

Box 3: Improvement suggestions made by the Ramblers' Association

Holes on the map – no rights of way in areas bounded by a normal density of paths including:

- a) *MoD land* - specific examples include Upper Heyford airfield, Bicester airfield, and Otmoor.
- b) *"Historically 'hostile' landowners"* - their specific examples include Middleton Park, with no access from Middleton Stoney and Upper Heyford; Wychwood Forest, with no east to west route and only one north to south route, Other estates with noticeable gaps include Eynsham Hall Park, Heythrop Park and Wytham Woods

Gaps on the map – abruptly/unnaturally ending paths including:

- c) *Path/road disjunctions* – road verge improvements or creations at Fringford/Stratton Audley, Marsh Baldon on B4105; Long Wittenham on B4016 and unclassified road, Deddington B4031, Adderbury A4260.
- d) *Paths ending at administrative boundaries* –Lewknor/ Stokenchurch parish and county boundary.
- e) *Roads* – crossing of A34/A412, M40 interchange.
- f) *Old diversions* based on agricultural 'efficiency' should be reviewed and diverted back. Little Milton to Thame, Stepping stones at Chippinghurst, Hanborough and Freeland, Bald Hill, Lewknor

Additions

- g) *riversides* –Thames tributaries, Rivers Glyme, Dorn, Swer Brook, Sor Brook, Hazelford Brook. Windrush between Witney and county boundary needs a number of links.
- h) *summits* – Madmarston Hill, Jesters Hill and Round Hill amongst many in the Ironstone Hills, Wytham Hill and Beacon Hill.
- i) *disused railways* - Hook Norton to Chipping Norton, Witney to Fairford, Thame to Oxford.
- j) *circular walks* – completing the county wide process for Bicester and Chipping Norton amongst others.

NB these are suggestions supplied as part of the RoWIP consultation. Similar types of improvements could benefit cyclists, equestrians and motorised users. There is no implication that these particular suggestions will become the priorities for the Council to deliver improvements for the RoWIP. The consultation that has taken place for the RoWIP will not replace the need for consultation and negotiation as and when specific proposals for action are taken forward. The publication of a RoWIP does not affect people's right to make representations or objections to public path orders that may be made in the light of plans, nor to have those representations or objections heard

KEY ISSUE 4: Local councils submitted over 500 suggestions for specific improvements to existing and potential new public rights of way that they felt would benefit their residents as well as visitors. However these are still just a small fraction of the countywide level of demand, as well as that already recorded on the network. OCC could make a real difference to local communities and visitors by responding to local councils with positive action. Although there is currently no extra capacity in the Service, some means of prioritising these improvements needs to be built in to the Service's day-to-day work, as well as exploring innovative options and partnership working.

AIM 1-4

Applications for changes to the network

39. The County Council maintains a register of applications for Definitive Map Modification Orders (DMMOs) and Public Path Orders (PPOs) on its website at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/modificationsanddiversions. At June 2012 there were 91

DMMO applications and 22 PPO applications, at various stages in the application process. It is anticipated that these applications will be included in the electronic assessment. Section 3.3 contains more details about these procedures.

Network adequacy - The 'whole access' network

40. The whole access network available to the public includes much more than the rights recorded on the Definitive Map and Statement (DMS). Other access, mostly available only to walkers, includes Woodland Trust, National Trust and Wildlife Trust sites, canal towpaths, permissive routes including routes made available under Environmental Stewardship or similar schemes, licenced routes (where users pay a fee or toll to enable them to ride over a period of time), land owned by institutional landowners such as local authorities, charities and educational institutes, public open space, and new 'access land' (mapped downland and commons). In addition there are off-road cycle tracks and minor surfaced and unsurfaced roads that offer recreation and commuting potential.
41. ***Access land mapped under part I, CROW Act 2000:*** The Countryside Agency's conclusive map of access land details the designated areas of open country and registered common land. Within Oxfordshire there are the following areas of access land –see Figure 5 and Plate 4:

Open Country (downland)

- 23 'parcels' or sites – 5 hectares (ha) to 150ha
- 500 ha in total

Registered Common Land

- 34 sites over 3ha
- 30 sites under 3ha

Forestry Commission freehold estate (voluntarily dedicated late 2005)

- 12 sites –634 ha in total

Figure 5: Access land in Oxfordshire

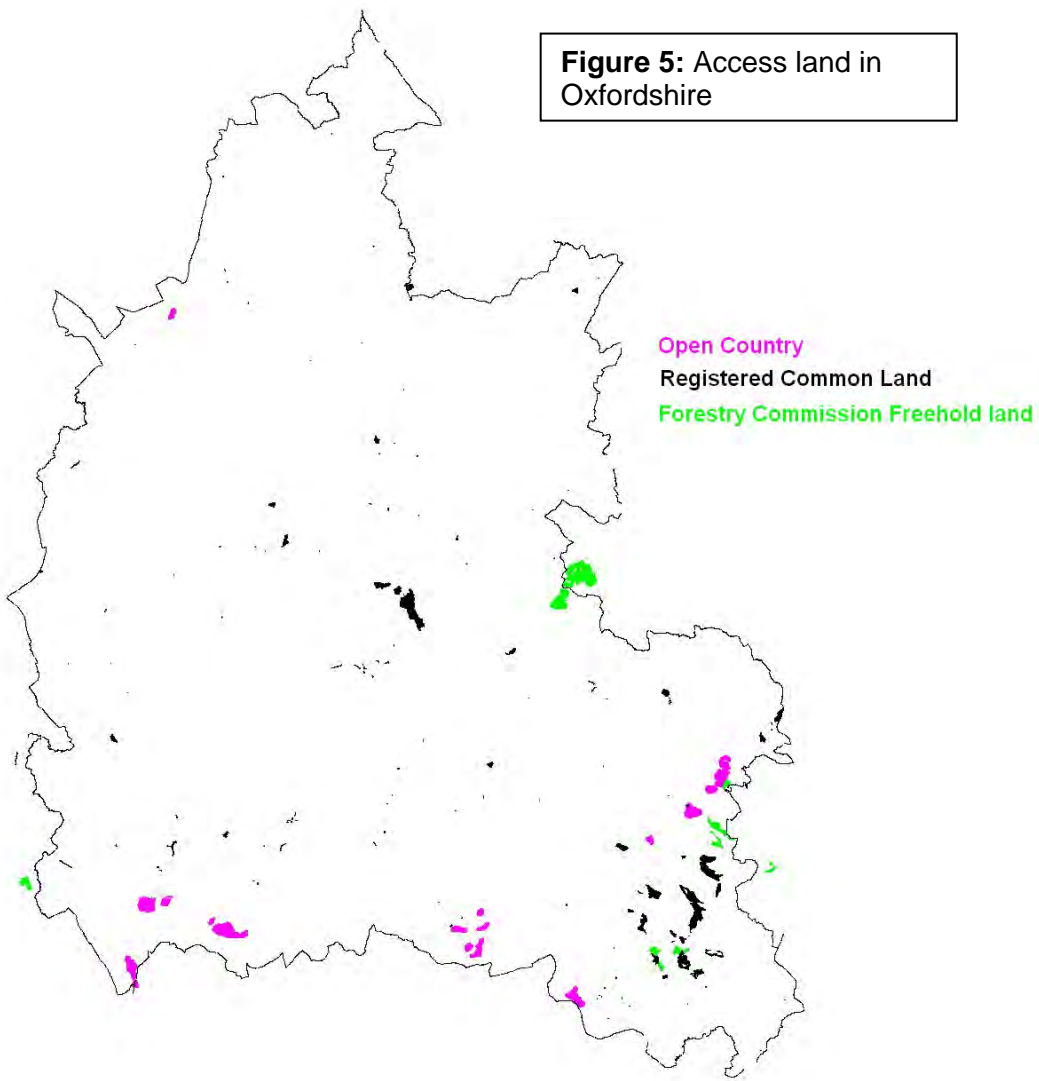


Plate 4: Access land at Shirburn Hill

42. **Formal permissive access:** Routes created by permission with the agreement of the land manager are often created through agri-environmental schemes. As at June 2012 there are 59 such agreements in Oxfordshire, all of which are available to walkers, eleven are for horseriders and cyclists, and one is for wheelchair users, Table 1.

Table 1: Agri-environment scheme permissive access (<http://cwr.defra.gov.uk> June 2012)

Cherwell	Bainton Farm - near Bicester Broughton Estate - near Banbury Broughton Grounds Farm - near Banbury Cow Lane Farm - near Hook Norton Deerfields Farm - near Banbury Four Winds Farm - near Charlton-On-Otmoor Grange Farm - near Bicester	Hornton Hill Farm - near Banbury Kirtlington Farms - near Bicester New House Farm - near Charlton-On-Otmoor Otmoor - near Charlton-On-Otmoor Oxford Canal/River Cherwell Meadow - near Kidlington Shipton On Cherwell - near Kidlington Park And Abbey Farms - near Banbury
South	Castle Hill Farm - near Wheatley Church Farm A & B - near Lewknor Crowmarsh Battle Farm - near Wallingford Greenfield Farm - near Watlington Hall Farm - Land At Cholsey - near Didcot Hall Farm - Land At Milton Park - near Didcot	Hill Farm - near Didcot Ouseley Barn Farm - near Goring Views Farm - near Wheatley Wadley Hill Farm - near Beckley Watlington Park - near Watlington
Vale	Bower Farm - near Aldworth Church Farm - near West Hanney Zouch Farm - near Culham Woodway Farm - near Blewbury Sparsholt Manor Farm - near Wantage	Manor Road Farm - near Wantage Home Farm - near Faringdon Warborough Farm - near Wantage Kingsgrove Farms (A) and (B) - near Abingdon
West	Downhills Farm A & B - near Freeland/Church Hanborough Field Farm - near Faringdon Glebe Farm - near Bampton Glympton Estate - near Woodstock Heythrop Park - near Chipping Norton Jubilee Meadows - near Woodstock Kilmester Farm Site B - near Lechlade Manor Farm, Little Rollright - near Chipping Norton Minster Lovell Meadows - near Witney	Nill Farm - near Hook Norton Over Norton Park - near Chipping Norton Oxleaze / Southrop - near Lechlade Oxleaze Farm - near Lechlade Pudlicote - near Chipping Norton Rectory Farm - near Witney Sandford Common Farm - near Chipping Norton Swerford Castle - near Chipping Norton Upper Court Farm - near Chadlington Village Farm A & B - nr Chipping Norton
Oxford	North Hinksey Meadow - near Oxford	

Plate 5: Oxfordshire farms with stewardship access (from Defra website June 2012)



43. There is often great access value supplied by these permissive access schemes, particularly when they provide new access to rivers, streams, viewpoints and also where they provide links or access for different types of user. New areas of access land will also benefit from access linking routes provided by these schemes. The Environmental Stewardship Scheme places access as one of its main targets in the Higher Level Scheme, alongside habitat improvement and increasing biodiversity. However, agreements are linked to individual land managers which mean that potential linking routes are sometimes replaced with less beneficial circulars, rather than a more direct, logical or attractive route. In addition agreements are often limited to ten years so are not shown on OS maps or recorded (and therefore protected) on the DMS. For these reasons, and also the vulnerability of the route if land managers change, or change their minds, some users and user groups feel that permissive routes do not offer a valid alternative to a route provided in perpetuity. From 2011 permissive access is not eligible for revenue payments as part of new HLS schemes.
44. **Other informal access:** It should be appreciated that in addition to this formal and statutory access, there is a wide range of informal access (not trespass) that is enjoyed by many people across the county. This is usually confined to inhabitants of a local area on a goodwill basis. It is not our intention to map this access or publicise it. However we would recommend that people assure themselves that they are not trespassing or causing a criminal act by their actions and clarify whether such use is creating a right for others, or if it is explicitly allowed by permission. Land ownership changes can often stimulate disquiet about this type of access and it is sometimes preferable to negotiate some kind of formal arrangement if this sort of change is foreseeable. An example of this would be a parish council working with the Countryside Service field team and land manager in order to negotiate a path creation agreement under s25 Highways Act 1980.

KEY ISSUE 5: There are disparities between the distribution, density and connectivity of the rights of way network between areas of Oxfordshire and between the different types of user. Oxfordshire is a county with a large number of public rights of way and other access resources, which are mostly available to walkers (according to their status). Currently there is uncertainty over the extent, availability and management of these resources, especially with regard to the role that they may play in a more 'joined-up' network.

AIM 1 to 4

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

45. The public rights of way and 'other' 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 Council appreciates that these barriers exist for all users, not just those with disabilities and tries to make access as easy as possible within the constraints of legislation and land management. We have taken the first steps towards providing better access information with the research, assessment and publication of a 'Walks for all' pack, plate 6 - twelve routes around the county that provide pleasant countryside experiences plus the access information (parking, gradients, surface type etc) necessary for a person to decide if the route is for them. We make the leaflets available on our website and also distribute them to individuals and relevant outlets.
46. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) has been replaced by the Equalities Act 2010. Defra has issued guidance about structures on public rights of way: (www.defra.gov.uk/rural/documents/countryside/prow/gpg-equality.pdf). The purpose of this Defra document is to offer good practice guidance to public authorities on the way that disability discrimination legislation impacts on their functions in relation to gates, stiles and other such structures on public rights of way. The Equality Act 2010 – formerly the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) 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 to benefit from those functions as others would do, or to show that there are good reasons for not doing so. The guidance is not statutory but simply aims to set out Defra's policy on structures on public rights of way and its view of the law. 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 County Council will have to pay even more account to the needs of people with disabilities when undertaking its maintenance functions, when authorising path furniture (gates and stiles etc) and other works on footpaths and bridleways, and when considering the creation of new routes and the diversion and improvement of existing routes. The Countryside Agency's publication "By all reasonable means" (CA 215, October 2005) sets out a framework for countryside managers and landowners to improve the accessibility of their sites, routes and facilities by focusing on work with and for disabled people. The Countryside Service will follow this framework, building upon our aim of using the 'Least Restrictive Access' option wherever we can. Section 3 has more information on the work we already do to make access easier.

KEY ISSUE 6: The public rights of way and 'other' 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 authority can make access better for people with mobility and visual impairments as part of its day to day rights of way management but we need to engage with land managers to encourage them to increase their support for making the countryside more accessible. Specific actions for users with disabilities could include a programme of further improvements and accessible route development as well as improved information. AIM 1-4

Users' needs and demands

47. The Countryside Service has undertaken a wide range of information gathering and primary research in order to contribute local perspectives to the RoWIP, and also for the day-to-day management and improvement of the network. This helps us 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 letter, website and telephone (see section 3.1 Network Availability)
- Citizens Panel questionnaire in 2002, 2006, 2008 and 2010 and six early discussion groups (see summary in Box 4)
- Developing the RoWIP by continuous discussion and liaison with key stakeholder groups, neighbouring and local authorities, OCAF and professional access practitioners
- Countryside wheelchair access assessment sent to blue badge holders and local councils at the start of the RoWIP process
- Making use of national, international and local needs based research

Box 4: Important Issues identified through the Citizens Panel research undertaken every 2 years since 2006

Overall, there was strong and encouraging support for all aspects of the Service's work on rights of way. Most suggestions were all centred around "*doing more of what the service does already*". Their top four suggestions for improvements were:

- **More vegetation cutting** There needs to be a greater frequency of grass cutting, especially targeted on paths closer to settlements or on promoted/linking routes.
- **Increasing path surfacing and drainage** We need to balance the benefits of surfacing path for users, especially families and lower agility people, against the risk of urbanising or over-managing the countryside. We also need to guard against conflicts on multi-use paths (such as between cyclists and walkers on narrow routes). Participants expressed considerable concern about 4x4 and motorcycle damage to paths.
- **Path protection** 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 was a problem on many routes, as were dog fouling and development of green spaces with housing.
- **Access to information** Strong need to improve this, linked to physical improvements of the paths themselves as well as on-path and off-path signs and information. Many respondents said that they lacked confidence and knowledge regarding their rights and responsibilities when out in the countryside.

AIM 1-4

How the network meets the needs of users

48. With regard to the needs of the main types of user (walkers, cyclists, equestrians and motorised users), it is realistically only possible to provide generic information. Each person wanting to use the path has their own set of needs and expectations and these cause significant difficulties if attempting to provide specific information. The key general issues for all users and some specific types are listed below.

- **All users** – no obstructions or unnecessary physical restrictions to access; paths waymarked according to the ease of following the route; enough information about a route on and off site in order to assess its suitability for their intended use; secure car parking or preferably easy access from settlements or public transport; opportunities for refreshments and toilet facilities; safe and convenient crossings of road and rail routes; path furniture safe and convenient to use. Overall, an integrated and well-managed network that allows them to explore and enjoy the whole of Oxfordshire with confidence.
- **Users with lower walking abilities** - gaps or pedestrian gates instead of stiles or field gates, handrails on steep slopes or beside steep drops, steps instead of steep slopes, resting places. Information about short, pleasant routes close to settlements and attractions.
- **Users with mobility impairments (wheelchair/pushchair)** – no man-made obstructions – need gaps or accessible gates, car parks with designated spaces and direct access, dropped kerbs, shallow gradients, slopes and minimal cambers, reasonably flat and stone/mud free surfaces, information at a suitable height and position. Well-publicised information and guide leaflets.
- **Users with visual impairments** - no hazards within path surface and in the space surrounding the path at sides and to a reasonable height; well-defined edges, signing and information - possible tapping rails or Braille signage. (Hosker *et al*, 2003).
- **Cyclists (family)** - wide, traffic free paths, with firm and smooth surface; no low branches or other hazards; gates should be easily openable.
- **Equestrians** - wide paths with any reasonable surface apart from sealed tarmac and sharp flint or stone; no low branches; gates should be wide enough and easily openable from horseback; safe refuges at roadside enabling risk-free gate negotiation; longer traffic-free routes available from stables and horse-box parking.

AIM 1-4

49. **Meeting users' needs in the key subject areas:** As part of the RoWIP process, local authorities and key organisations and groups were asked for their views about how they felt the countryside access network meets the needs of different user types both currently and in the future. Each user type was divided into people with mobility impairments, people with visual impairments, people with no impairments and family groups. This assessment was based on the framework first put forward in the RoWIP Action Plan (OCC, 2003). Twenty-two responses were received representing these organisations' valuable understanding of the needs of local residents and visitors to the area. Although we have tabulated data in order to provide a degree of quantitative analysis for each subject area (in the full assessment of need), these results should be taken as more indicative rather than statistically accurate. These data have been combined with the other information sources for the summary of each subject area. Please note that the full version of the assessment of need contains more detailed explanation and charts.

Access to attractions (e.g. Country sites, viewpoints, rural experiences)

KEY ISSUE 7: Need significantly more and better access to attractions in order to encourage alternatives to motor vehicle use. Access to be provided according to users' needs and in harmony with the local environment.

AIM 2 & 4

Access to facilities (e.g. shops, schools, village halls, pubs, toilets)

KEY ISSUE 8: The availability, role and promotion of local facilities needs to be considered in the provision of promoted routes. Where local facilities are known to be available, their operators should be encouraged and supported in order that they may be better informed about the particular needs, demands and opportunities afforded different user groups.

AIM 2 & 4

Awareness/adherence to rights and responsibilities

KEY ISSUE 9: An increase in the awareness and compliance with rules and regulations should be encouraged, using innovative and interactive techniques where possible. Need more education to inform users of rights and responsibilities, with enforcement where necessary.

AIM 4

Levels of competence

KEY ISSUE 10: Conflicts between users caused by lower levels of competence or confidence could be reduced by providing a network that is easier to find and use. There should also be a sensitive and appropriate approach to shared use routes whilst ensuring that users are aware of their potential impact on other users as well as the path.

AIM 1-4

Traffic free routes

KEY ISSUE 11: Traffic-free routes offer a significantly increased opportunity for quiet enjoyment by all users. However improvements and upgrades need to be appropriate to the path and location. Rural traffic should be tackled at source with the creation and promotion of routes from settlements and transport interchanges. Equestrians are more likely to be affected by traffic levels, obstructions and dangerous road crossings

AIM 2 & 4

Surface conditions

KEY ISSUE 12: Paths should have a well-maintained surface that is appropriate for the route's status, location and level of use. Particular consideration should be given to the needs of people with vision and mobility impairments, and to the character of the area.

AIM 1-3

KEY ISSUE 13: Vegetation clearance should be sufficient to allow the route to be enjoyed by users according to its status, location and level of use. Particular consideration should be given to promoted, linking and circular routes, and to the needs of people with vision or mobility impairments. In addition, due regard should be paid to users' personal security, the character of the area and habitat/wildlife disturbance.

AIM 1-3

Vegetation growth

Path furniture (Includes stiles, gates & bridges plus the fastenings too)

KEY ISSUE 14: Path furniture (stiles, gates, bridges) should pose the minimum restriction necessary to control the movement of livestock. High priority should be given to reducing the amount of path furniture that can exclude lawful users of the countryside, regardless of terrain. Any furniture that is in place should be well maintained, safe and easy to use. Particular consideration should be given to the needs of people with vision and mobility impairments. Equestrian users and cyclists should be able to easily and safely negotiate gates without dismounting.

AIM 1-4

Promoted routes

KEY ISSUE 15: Local authority promoted routes should be those that add social and economic value and encourage confidence and access to Oxfordshire's countryside. Particular consideration should be given to quality of the information and experience for users with mobility and visual impairments. Routes should be assessed for their ability to provide high quality and easy access to attractive areas of countryside, as well as whether they offer alternatives to car use and access to local facilities and services, thereby contributing directly to the local economy.

AIM 1-4

The extent to which the rights of way network is managed to meet the needs of users

Network availability

50. Availability factors are the physical side of the public's rights over the land – The condition of the network's infrastructure. However 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 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.
51. The Countryside Service has developed a comprehensive database of rights of way management information. This database allows the following information (Table 2) regarding the state of the path network to be detailed with a high degree of confidence.

Table 2: Snapshot of OCC RoW network availability data, 2006 and 2012 (Source OCC Access Management System January 2006 and June 2012)

	2006	2012
Paths open	94.3% of path links* were found to be free of major obstructions <i>*a path link is a section of a path between any two junctions with a road or another public right of way. There may be more than one link to a particular right of way.</i>	95.39% path links free from major obstructions (478 path links have an unresolved issue relating to an obstruction out of 10390)
Paths easy to use	63% of paths were found to be easy to use* <i>*the 'easy to use' figure adopts the Audit Commission's quality standards for position, furniture, signing, surface and vegetation. OCC survey methodology surveys a random 2.5% of network twice a year. 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>	2012 (spring only): 71.36% by length of paths passed, 78.12% by number of paths passed. 2011 (Spring&Summer) 74.18% by length of paths passed, 79.29% by number of paths passed
Signing	89% of 5073 roadside locations were signed	92.35% (4844) of 5242 roadside locations were signed
Waymarking	33% of 'easy to use' links would benefit from waymarking	2012: 35% of ease to use links surveyed in 2012 would benefit

Part B – Assessment of Need

	40.6% of 'not easy to use' links would benefit from waymarking	from waymarking (total passed links 330) 69% of not easy to use links surveyed in 2012 would benefit from waymarking (total links failed 95)(Total Links 425) 2011. 39%(270) of easy to use links surveyed in 2011 would benefit from waymarking (total passed links 689). 67% (119)of not easy to use links surveyed in 2011 would benefit from waymarking (total links failed 178)(Total Links 867)
Stiles	85% of 4834 stiles were in useable condition, 14% unsatisfactory, 1% dangerous	68% of 4194 stiles were useable (Good/Fair). Unsatisfactory – 13%, redundant. Dangerous <0.3%. Please note this does not include Stile/Bridge/Stile combi bridges
Gates	88% of 5784 gates were in useable condition, 12% unsatisfactory	72% of 7304 gates were useable (Good/Fair). Unsatisfactory -7.6%, Redundant – 7.5%
Bridges	93% of 2050 bridges in place and in useable condition,7% unsatisfactory, 5% missing, 1% dangerous	80.87% of 2274 bridges easy to use (Good/Fair). Unsatisfactory 0.5%, Missing – 0.5%. Dangerous <0.2%
Surfacing	408 instances of unsatisfactory surfaces, 8 dangerous, 239 surfaces causing obstruction to passage	93.14% of Surfaces easy to use (Good/Fair)
Caseload list at October 2005.	1973 need inspecting, 95 require site visit	409 need inspecting 55 require site visit
(single problems)	411 require task jobsheet 830 monitoring change	125 require task jobsheet 386 monitoring change
	5,141 Net outstanding recorded caseload	3,707 Net outstanding recorded caseload
Cases 'resolved'	1559 (Oct 05-Mar 06)	2012 to date (20/06/2012) = 777
(per year)	2679 (Oct 04-Sept 05)	2011 = 1691
	2366 (Oct 03-Sept 04)	2010 = 1463
	2350 (Oct 02-Sept 03)	2009 = 1793
	2715 (Oct 01-Sept 02)	2008 = 2289 , 2007 = 2296 2006 = 898
Access improvements	2001-2005	2006-2012
	stiles <i>decreased</i> from 4999 to 4834	<i>Stiles decreased</i> from 4834 to 4194
	gates <i>increased</i> from 5117 to 5784	<i>Gates increased</i> from 5784 to 7304
	bridges <i>increased</i> from 1924 to 2050	<i>Bridges increased</i> from 2050 to 2274

Top four obstructions (physical features) across the network				
	2006		2012	
	Footpath	Bridleway	Footpath	Bridleway
1	Fences	Fences	Fences	Gate/Locked or Tied
2	Barbed wire	Gates/gateways	Gate/Locked or Tied	Obstacles/ Encroachment
3	Hedges	Barbed wire	Fence/Barbed Wire Fence	Fence/Fences
4	Gates/gateways	Hedges	Fence/Electric Fences	Obstacles/ Unauthorised Structure
NB it should be borne in mind that summer vegetation growth and disturbance of the highway by agricultural operations can be common causes of dissatisfaction on the network				

KEY ISSUE 16: Data on network availability highlights the amount of problems still on the existing network that need to be tackled in order to get all paths up to the basic standard. They have to be taken in context with the constraints to management detailed in the next section. This in itself is a resourcing issue, and takes no account of the potential improvements that could be made were financial resources and staff capacity increased.

AIM 1 & 3

Network accessibility

52. The accessibility of the network is concerned with the ‘where’ and ‘how’ of access to the countryside. Where can a particular member of the public get directly onto a particular type of route for travel or enjoyment? (Distribution), and how do they find out about these paths and then get access to them? (Information). The ‘Extent of the network’ section discussed the distribution of the network and our proposals to assess the network according to settlements, attractions and user type. We are confident that this approach will enable us to more accurately gauge the accessibility of the network and will complement our existing body of knowledge at the county level.
53. **Information provision:** 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. The countryside is made up of a natural and cultural landscape incorporating the homes and livelihoods of many people and potentially hazardous locations, all of which need to be treated with due respect; information is essential for land managers too. The best source of information is the service’s web pages www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/countryside, which are kept up to date with information, recreational options and links to other organisations. The service has produced its ‘Local Council Guide to Improving Countryside Access’ to help communities understand access and try to improve it themselves. A major development is the production of an interactive countryside access map which includes the rights of way network, promoted routes and the access land network. It also allows map based reporting of any issues and problems that are found. The definitive map and statement is also available as PDF sheets on the

website. The two web addresses are: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/countrysideimap and www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/definitivemaponline

54. **Promoted route guides:** The Countryside Service promotes a small number of routes for walkers, cyclists and horse riders in order to encourage sustainable access to the countryside. This is achieved by encouraging the use of public transport, targeting specific groups, or by encouraging spending in the local economy at accommodation or refreshment facilities. The routes range from the Oxfordshire Way, a 68 mile linear route, and a small number of circular routes from villages between 2 and 8 miles in length. The Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails Team also produce extensive information, including their 'companion guide' that lists accommodation, transport and refreshment information in one package. Other authorities in the county produce leaflets –for example Cherwell District Council have a set of 10 routes in their area, as do the Chilterns and Cotswolds Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). In addition to these promoted routes, there are many privately produced publications that describe routes which have a particular focus, such as nature, beer, tea rooms or the historical landscape. ***The key point about this provision is that all of these routes use the public rights of way network. They therefore depend on the basic standard being implemented on all paths, and then maintained.***
55. **Information for less mobile users:** An extremely important area of under-supply is information and provision regarding access for users with disabilities, plus those with mobility impairments such as the less agile and those with pushchairs. There are some publications available; for example both the Cotswolds and Chilterns AONB produce "Miles without Stiles" booklets and leaflets giving details of walks in their areas. The Countryside Service tries to improve access on its promoted routes – by replacing stiles with gaps or gates and encouraging land managers to make access easier on all of their paths where they can. As a 'quick win' in the improvement planning process, with financial support from the LTP, we produced a pack of 'paths for all' – twelve routes around the county that provide access information (parking, gradients, surface type etc) on routes suitable for people with mobility and visual impairments. We make the leaflets and the other walks information freely downloadable available on our specialist web pages at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/walksandrides , plate 6. The interactive countryside map also includes gradient information for every public right of way which can help with journey planning.

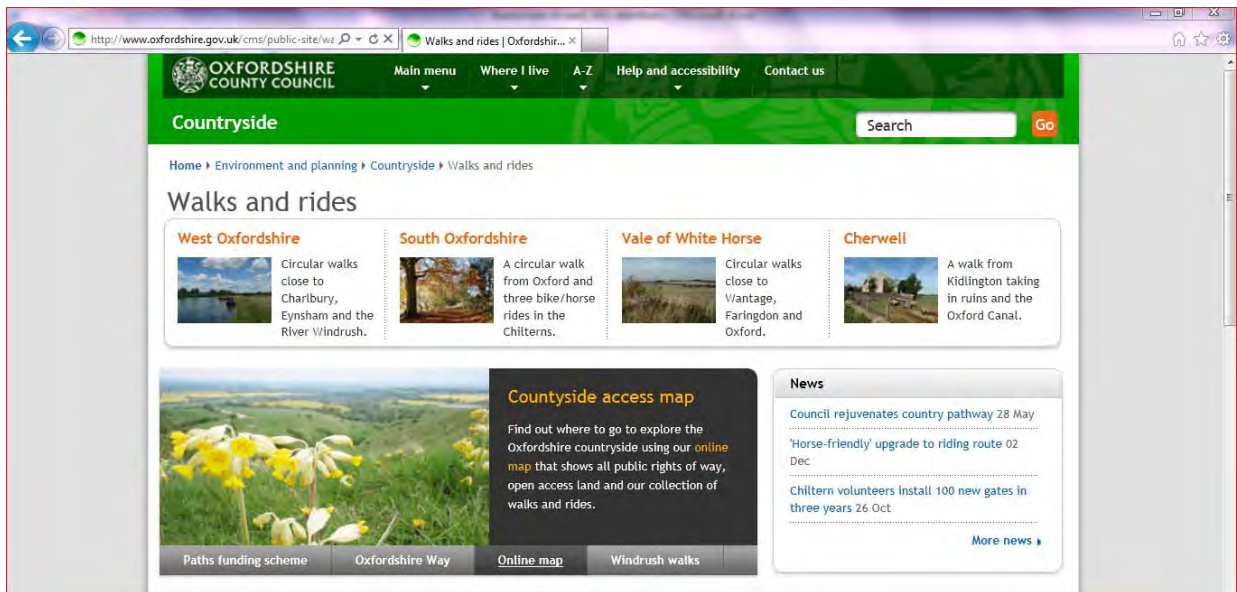


Plate 6: The services walks and rides website 'landing' page

KEY ISSUE 17: Oxfordshire's local rights of way network is likely to have differing levels of accessibility, both in terms of the distribution of the path network from settlements and attractions (such as viewpoints, rivers, National Trust properties etc) and also the information provision to users. An important early stage is to research the adequacy of path distribution across the county in an efficient and meaningful way in order to establish baseline information. This should be settlement and attraction based.

Second stage research could then aspire to assess the whole network based on physical and visual impairment factors; including steps, gradients, path furniture and visual path definition. This then ties in with the improvement suggestions supplied by the Ramblers' Association and local councils. The supply, take up and adherence to guidance and information – on the ground as well as in other formats, needs to be reviewed in order to ensure that it is effective, targeted and as inclusive as possible.

AIM 2-4

How the network is managed

56. OCC Countryside Service undertake the majority of the statutory work necessary to define, protect and maintain the rights of way network, as well as working to improve, inform and promote responsible access to the countryside.
57. The Service's countryside access responsibilities are delivered by 20 FTE staff based at Signal Court in Eynsham. Since January 2012 there have been two teams – 1) The definitive map and commons team deal with keeping under review and legal changes to the Definitive Map and Statement (DMS), managing the register of common land, and processing applications to register town and village greens. 2) The countryside access team who deal with enforcement, maintenance and improvement issues; planning and development, access land management, information and marketing, RoWIP and access policy.

58. For 2005/6 the approximate gross budget for these three teams was £936,000, of which £539,000 was spent on staff and £397,000 on materials, contracts, equipment and overheads. For 2012/13 the gross budget is £863,000, of which £648,000 is spent on staff costs and £215,000 on materials, legal services, contracts, equipment and overheads. Around £100,000 capital has been allocated for strategic bridge work.

Definitive Map & Commons team

59. This team manage the Definitive Map and Statement, plate 7, and, since 2011, the register of common land, village and town greens. The DMS can be modified where there is sufficient evidence to show it to be incorrect. Anyone can apply for a Definitive Map Modification Order (DMMO) through the County Council. As at June 2012, there are 90 applications pending at various stages of the DMMO process. Current demand for DMMOs is already greater than the team's existing capacity.
60. Applications can also be made to change the alignment or extinguish a right of way, by applying for a Public Path Order (PPO); these are normally applied for by landowners. If their application is successful then alterations of the route can be made on the ground and on the DMS. As at June 2012, there were 47 cases pending at various stages of the PPO process



Plate 7: An extract from the 2006 DMS and the online access map

61. Landowners can also agree to dedicate additional public rights of way across their land. Often this is done as part of a built development, or to formalise a well-used track.

Countryside Access Team

62. The peculiar challenge of rights of way work is that in the majority, public rights exist over private land that is still 'worked' or farmed. This contrasts with 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. All of this work is predominantly for the field team to deliver. Within the team there are four area field officers and two assistants, plus a small specialised 'tasks team'. Each of the area officers manages an active caseload of around 900-2000 'reports' for roughly a district area of 600 miles of paths, and the tasks team (plate 8) undertake the majority of the maintenance work. Reports may vary from simple signing issues, to complex areas such as providing access for people with disabilities, development control, public safety, or land management. These current high caseload levels are unsustainable when it comes to delivery of the authority's existing responsibilities not to mention proactive ambitions for making the countryside more accessible to all. The team will need additional investment so that local and strategic improvements, already identified by our research, can be made.



Plate 8: Tasks Team clearing winter vegetation

63. Production and management of the RoWIP process (then securing funding for improvements and project management post-publication), and undertaking our responsibilities on new areas of access land, are also part of the countryside access team, together with strategic planning for countryside access around the county, and the management and development of the Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum and providing information, plate 9.
64. Increasing reliance is placed on integrated data management and the service uses the Exegesis Countryside Access Management System. This enables efficient management of the access network and has also enable the development of the online interactive countryside access map www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/countrysidemap



Plate 9: Countryside Service information panels at the Henley Show

KEY ISSUE 18: The Countryside Service is striving to identify and meet the past, current and future demands of legislation and users of the countryside, whilst working in partnership and understanding with land managers and local councils. All of this work is undertaken within the confines of severely constrained staff and budgetary resources.

Definitive Map team

- Backlog of current work and likely influx of new demands outstrip existing capacity and resources. Ideally need additional staff capacity for DMMO, PPO, Common land & village green searches and administration, RoWIP dedications, investigations, order procedures and decision making.

Countryside Access team

- Backlog of current work and inability to manage existing network to an adequate standard and fulfil the statutory duty. Little capacity to improve access for less able users, to provide for the recreation/journey needs of both locals and visitors, or work with partners to develop network in ways that benefit the local economy. Ideally need additional staff and budgets essential for current rights of way and other access responsibilities as well as future improvements. Applied to practical works on the ground as well as area network management.

AIM 1 – 4

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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 Statutory figure returned annually to central government to measure performance of statutory work to assert, protect and maintain rights of way. BVPI 178 relates to ‘ease of use’ of public rights of way.
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.
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 Service	The part of Oxfordshire County Council who’s work includes protecting, maintaining, improving and promoting public rights of way and other countryside access resources.
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.
DMS	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.
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”).
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.
Fieldfare Trust	A charity which works with people with disabilities and countryside managers to improve access to the countryside for all.
Environment Agency	Government agency responsible for river management, waste management, pollution control and other environmental matters.
Environmental Stewardship	A new agri-environment scheme administered by the RDS which provides funding to farmers and other land managers in England who deliver effective environmental management on their land.
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.
Forestry Commission	The Government body responsible for managing the state's forests as well as supporting the management of privately owned woodland.
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	The land over which a right of way runs.
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 interests. Oxfordshire's LAF is known as the Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum (OCAF).
Landfill tax	A tax on landfill operators, part of which helps to fund projects in the local area
LTP	Local Transport Plan Five year strategic plan covering highways and transport within Oxfordshire.
National Trail	Long distance route supported by Natural England.
National Trust	Charity that looks after nationally important property.
NFU	National Farmers' Union
ORPA	Other Route with Public Access A non-statutory designation route shown by the OS on their 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

Oxfordshire Highways	The part of Oxfordshire County Council that maintains the road network, cycletracks and asphalted footpaths.
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.
PCT	Primary Care Trusts The way that the National Health's services are delivered within an geographic or administrative area.
Private Right of Way	A right of way for an individual or any group other than the public at large.
PPO	Public Path Order Legal order which creates, extinguishes or diverts a footpath or bridleway.
Public Right of Way	A right of passage by the public over the highway for the purpose of passing and repassing and for incidental reasonable purposes.
Quiet Lanes	Countryside Agency scheme aimed at maintaining the character of minor rural roads by seeking to contain rising traffic growth.
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.
RDS	Rural Development Service Part of Defra that delivers ERDP schemes and rural services. Works with rural partners and local people to enhance the environment, improve the conservation of wildlife and biodiversity, and strengthen rural economies and communities.
Right to Roam	A commonly used term used to describe the new rights of access to open country and registered common land Introduced under the CROW Act.
Signpost	See Fingerpost
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.
TROT	Toll Rides (Off Road) Trust Charity that establishes pay-to-use permissive routes for equestrians.
Tourism providers	Includes tourist attractions, destination marketing organisations and tourism officers working for local authorities.
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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Oxfordshire's public rights of way network – assessment of connectivity

As part of 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) by Exegesis Spatial Data Management Ltd.

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

This information is intended to be used as a tool to help inform the identification of areas that could potentially benefit from additional routes through the countryside as well as measures on roads that could help improve connectivity and safety.

These could be standalone projects or schemes that are linked to an area's Local Development Framework, green infrastructure strategy or as mitigation for a particular development. The study was not able to take account of the other access resources that are available the public, including access land, the minor and unsurfaced road network, cycletracks, permissive paths under stewardship agreements, nature reserves, Woodland Trust and National Trust and areas made available under Inheritance Tax exemptions -so these should be considered as part of any detailed assessments.

Contents

Map 1 – connected walking network

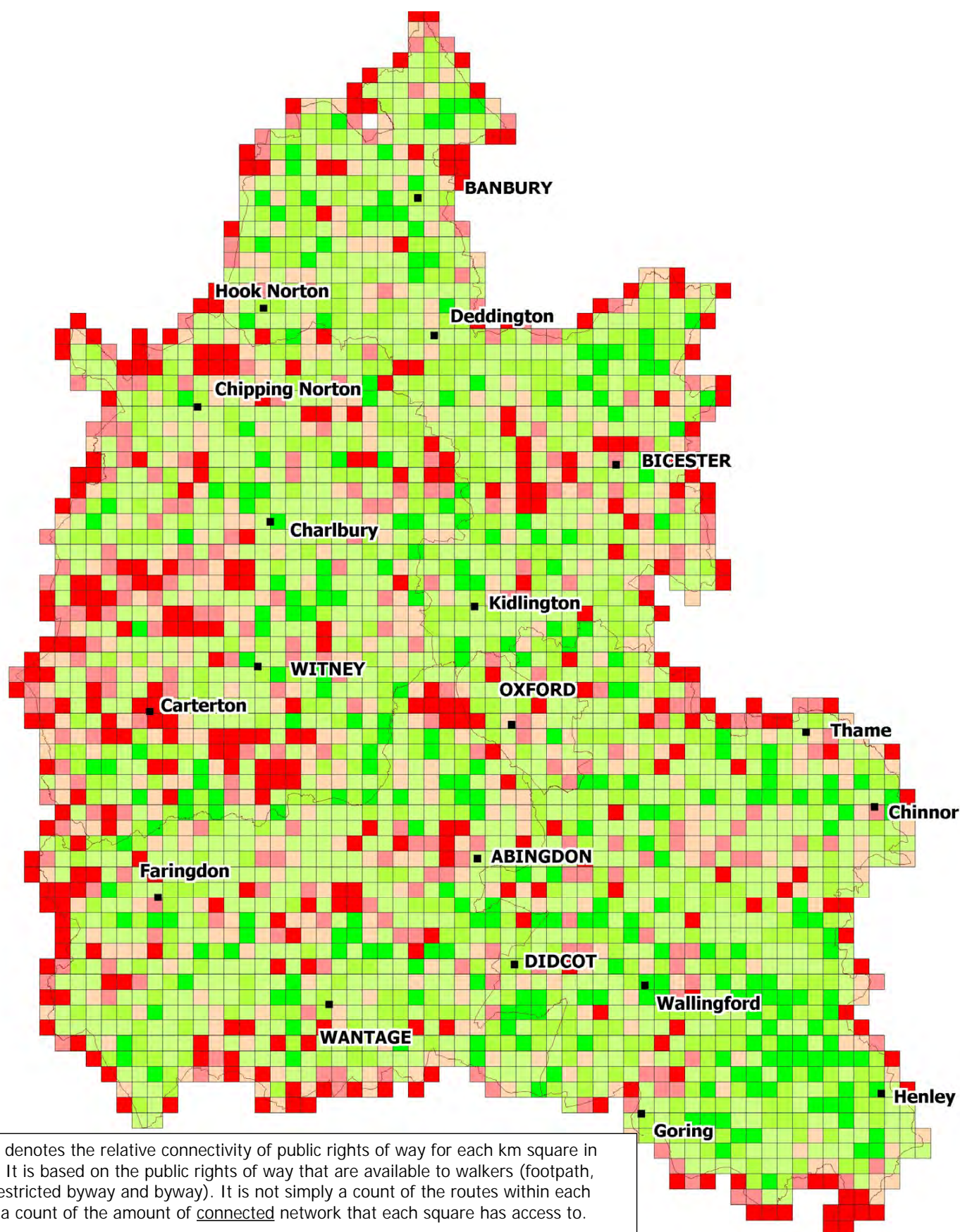
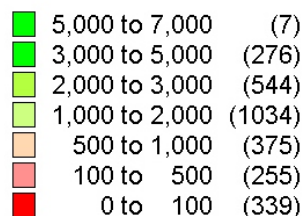
Map 2 – connected riding network

Map 3 – connected walking network (settlements)

Map 4 – connected riding network (settlements)

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This graphic denotes the relative connectivity of public rights of way for each km square in Oxfordshire. It is based on the public rights of way that are available to walkers (footpath, bridleway, restricted byway and byway). It is not simply a count of the routes within each square, it is a count of the amount of connected network that each square has access to.

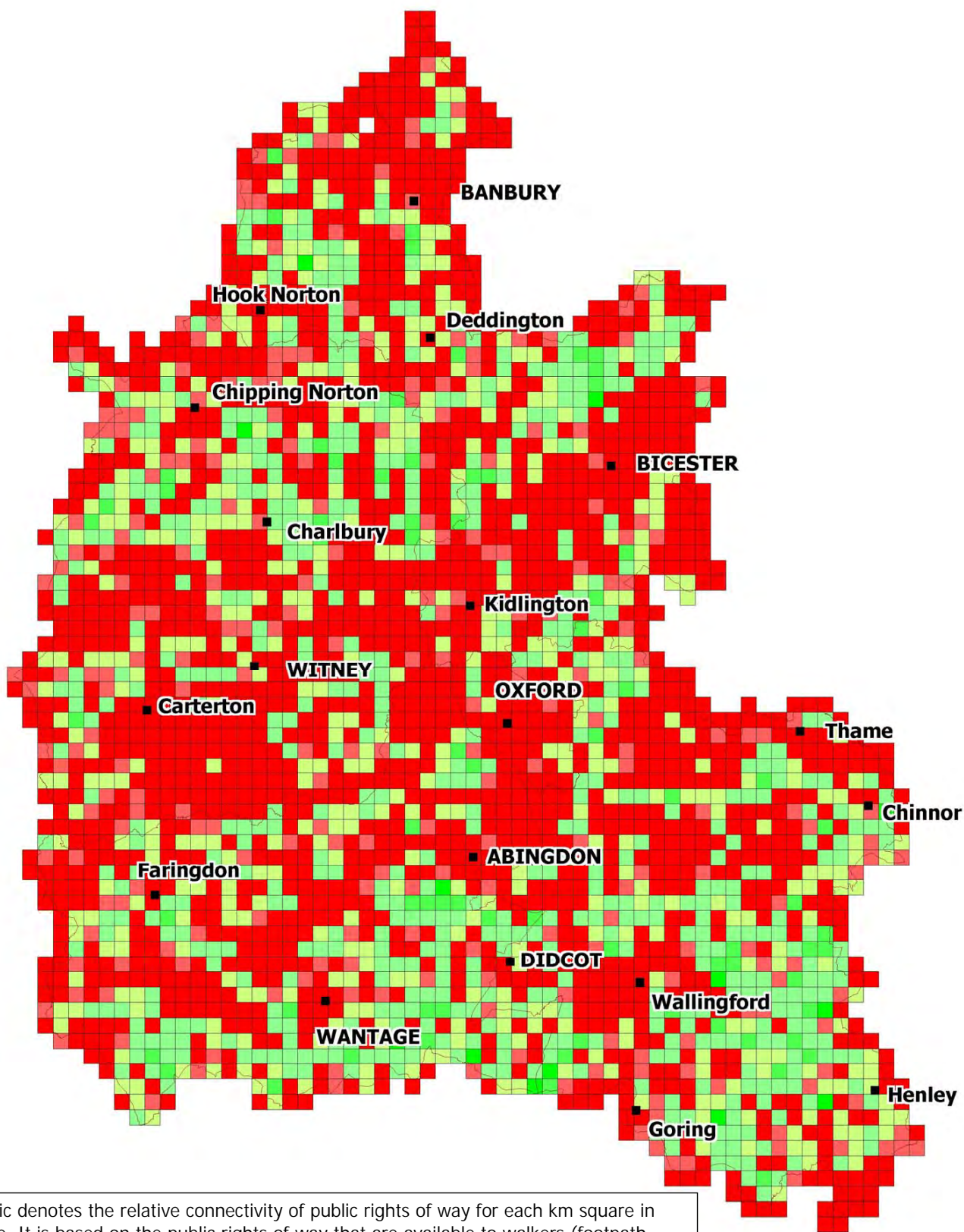
It is not able to take account of the minor and unclassified road network, cycletracks, or other access facilities other than the public rights of way network. It also cannot include neighbouring authority networks. © Oxfordshire County Council 2007

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Metres of connected riding network from each km square

Uses all public rights of way except footpaths. Brackets show number of km squares

3,000 to 4,000	(13)
2,000 to 3,000	(72)
1,000 to 2,000	(554)
500 to 1,000	(459)
200 to 500	(251)
0 to 250	(1481)



This graphic denotes the relative connectivity of public rights of way for each km square in Oxfordshire. It is based on the public rights of way that are available to walkers (footpath, bridleway, restricted byway and byway). It is not simply a count of the routes within each square, it is a count of the amount of connected network that each square has access to.

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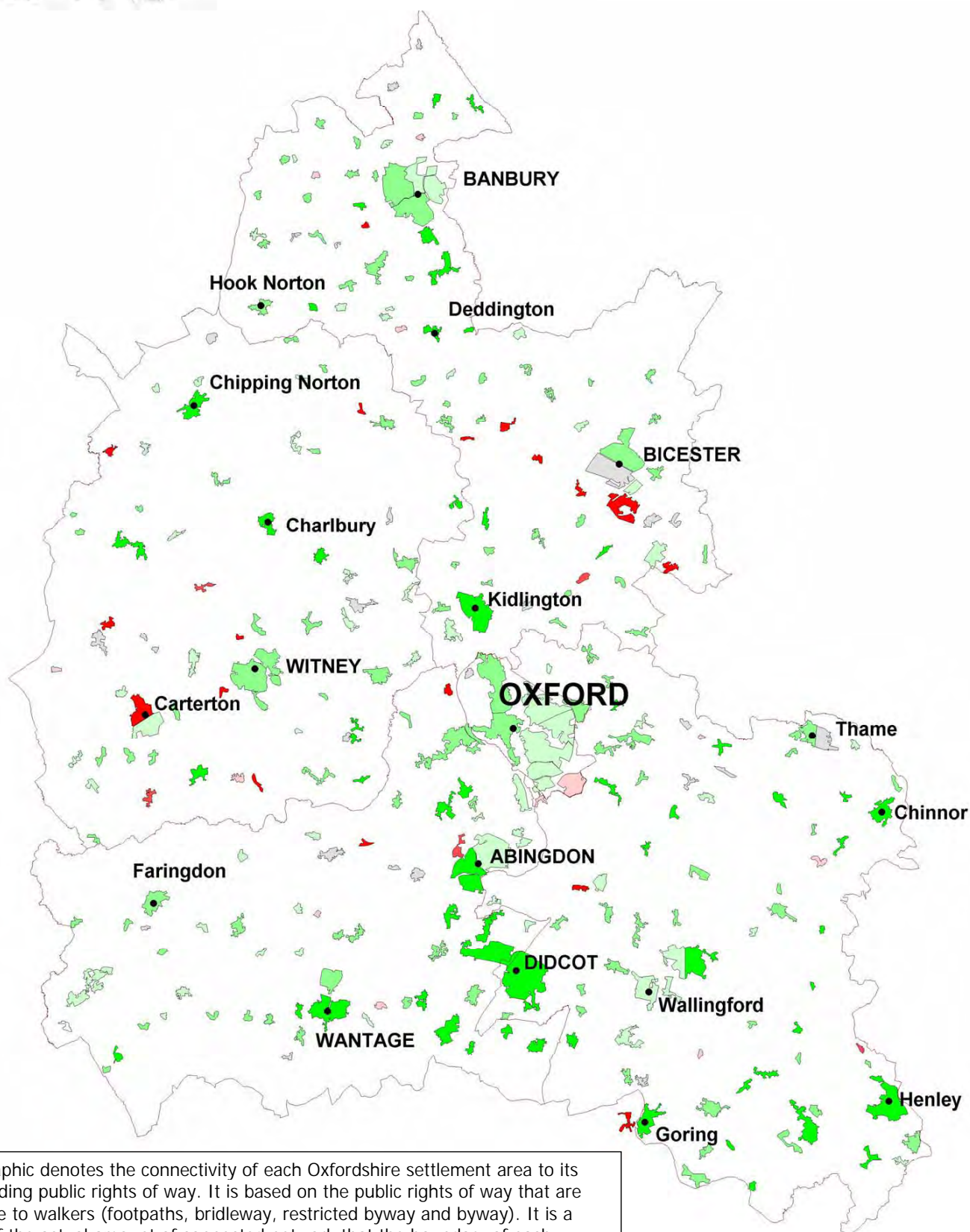
OS Licence LA 076805

Metres of connected network available to walkers from settlements

Uses all public rights of way. Figures in brackets are number of settlements

Map 3

20,000 to 45,000	(57)
10,000 to 20,000	(116)
5,000 to 10,000	(63)
3,000 to 5,000	(25)
1,500 to 3,000	(12)
500 to 1,500	(5)
0 to 500	(18)



This graphic denotes the connectivity of each Oxfordshire settlement area to its surrounding public rights of way. It is based on the public rights of way that are available to walkers (footpaths, bridleway, restricted byway and byway). It is a count of the actual amount of connected network that the boundary of each settlement has access to, based on the journey options available in a fixed radius

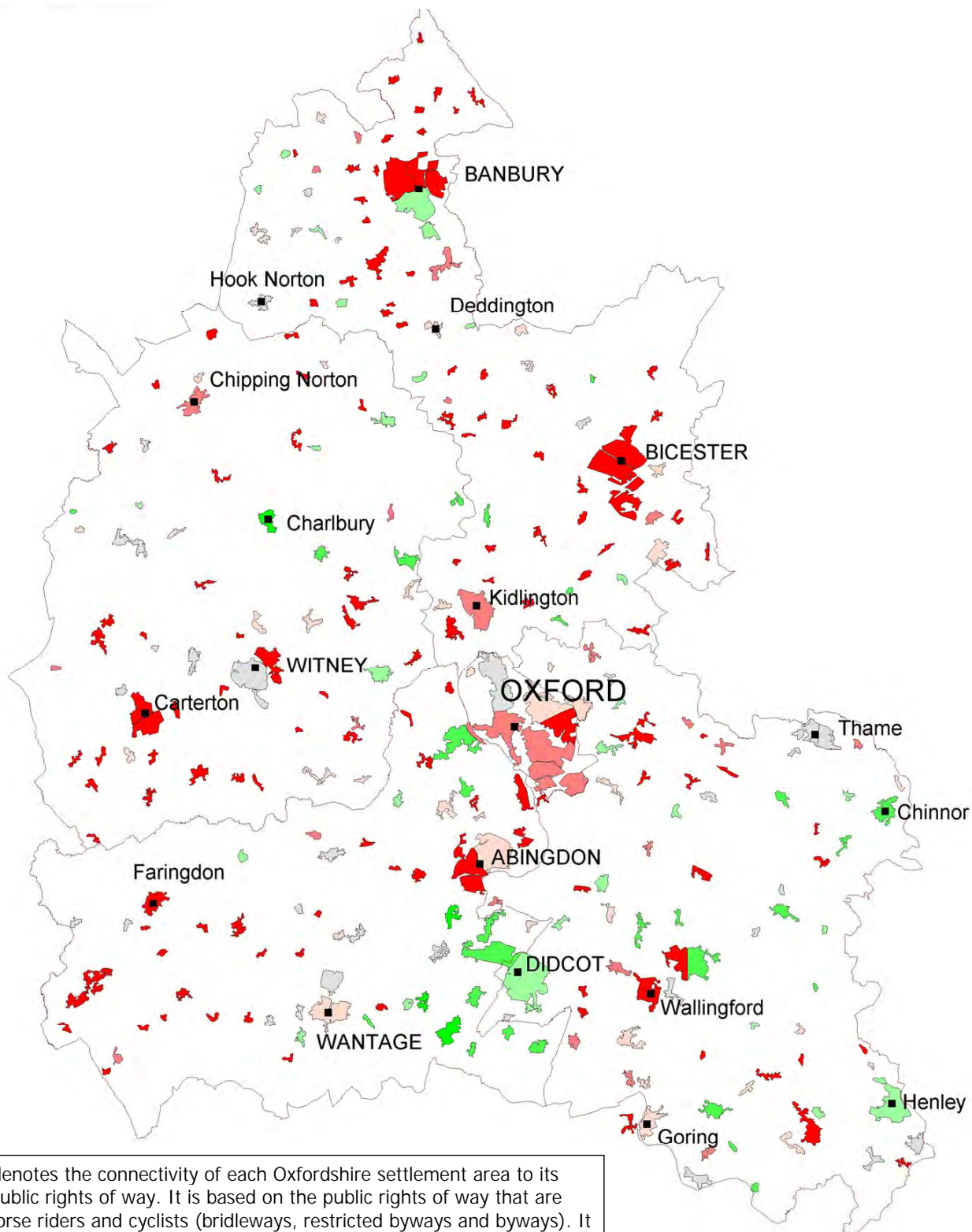
It is not able to take account of the minor and unclassified road network, cycletracks, or other access facilities other than the public rights of way network.
© Oxfordshire County Council 2007. OS Licence LA 076805

Metres of connected network available to riders from settlements

Map 4

Uses all public rights of way except footpaths. Figures in brackets are numbers of settlements

20,000 to 60,000	(4)
10,000 to 20,000	(28)
5,000 to 10,000	(28)
3,000 to 5,000	(28)
1,500 to 3,000	(44)
500 to 1,500	(26)
0 to 500	(139)



This graphic denotes the connectivity of each Oxfordshire settlement area to its surrounding public rights of way. It is based on the public rights of way that are available to horse riders and cyclists (bridleways, restricted byways and byways). It is a count of the actual amount of connected network that the boundary of each settlement has access to, based on the journey options available in a fixed radius

It is not able to take account of the minor and unclassified road network, cycletracks, or other access facilities other than the public rights of way network.
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Oxfordshire's public rights of way – disjunctions in the network

As part of work to achieve the aims of the Oxfordshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan, the public rights of way network has been assessed for its 'disjunctions' –points where public rights of way meet roads and other barriers – and where there is not a close connection on the opposite side of that road. Some of these match with suggestions submitted as part of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan production.

This information is intended to be used as a tool to help inform the identification of rights of way that could potentially benefit from linking routes to avoid or provide an alternative to road use, as well as measures on roads or other barriers that could help improve connectivity and safety. These could be standalone projects or schemes that are linked to an area's Local Development Framework, integrated transport strategy, green infrastructure strategy or specific developments that arise.

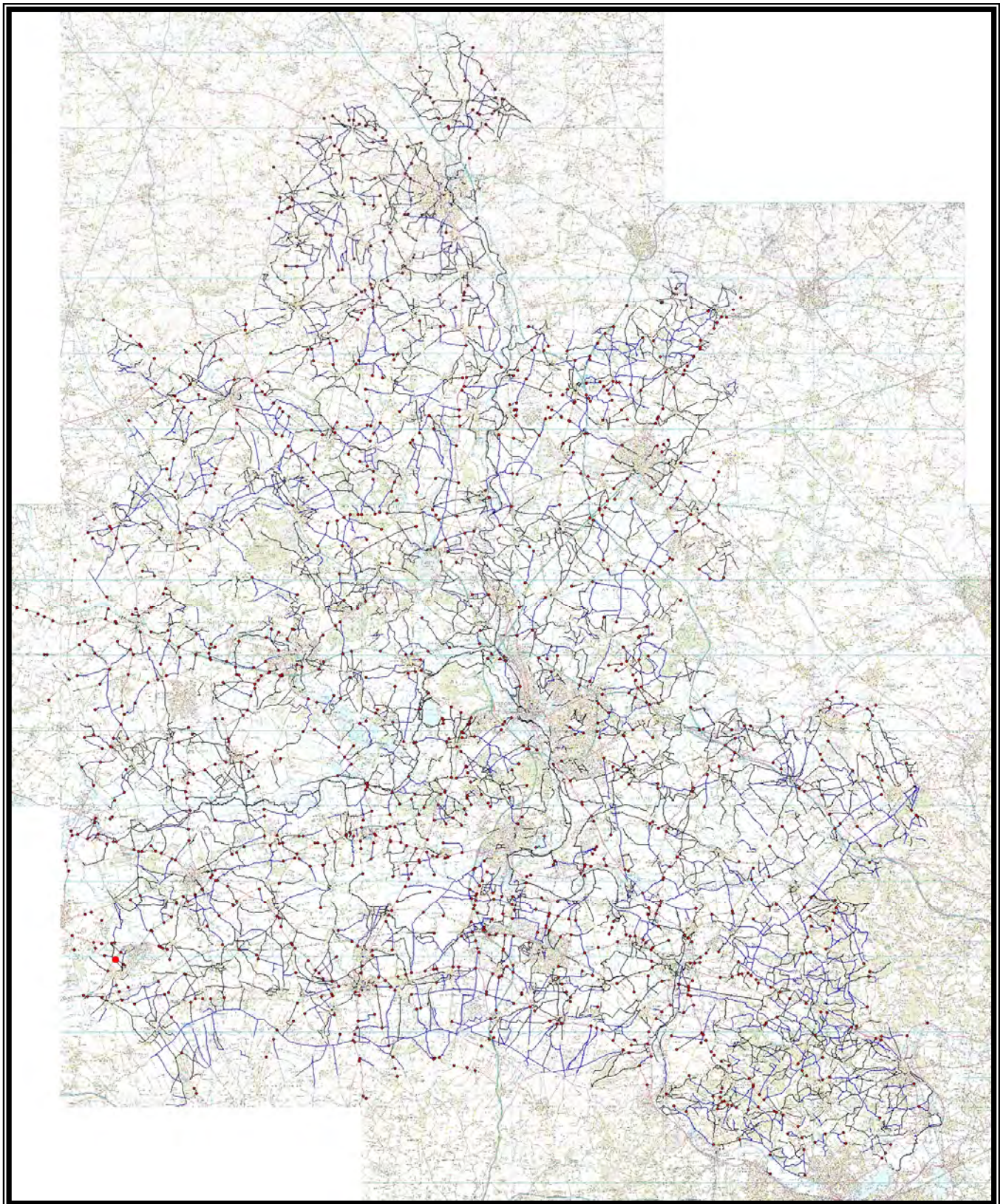
The study has not been able to categorise the disjunctions and this is an area for additional work or for assessing potential projects. Examples of categories could include known hazardous roads & blackspot areas, links that would connect a wider network, routes that would join up access to settlements and facilities, links that enable walking or riding access to attractions etc.

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

The study is a work in progress so there may be errors and there may be other disjointed routes that are not indicated.

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Black lines are footpaths

Blue lines are for bridleways, restricted byways and byways

Red circles are the points where PRoW meet a potential barrier

Oxfordshire's public rights of way – Suggestions for improvements

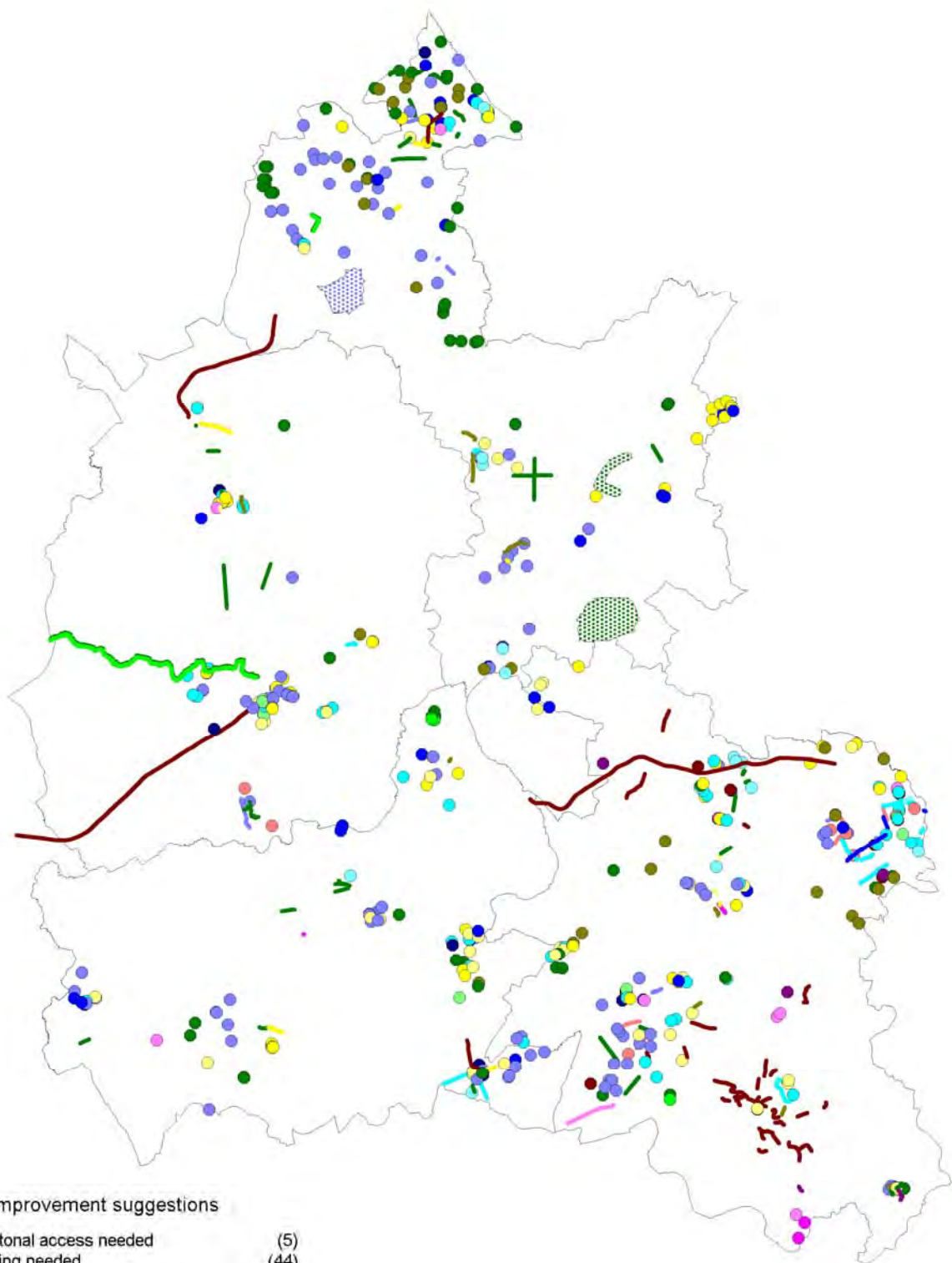
As part of work to produce the Oxfordshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP), local communities, user groups, individuals and organisations were asked to submit their suggestions for ways to improve public rights of way and the public rights of way network.

These suggestions have been collated and, since the RoWIP was adopted, have been added to with suggestions as they have been made. The study is a work in progress so there may be errors and there may be other potential routes that are not indicated. In addition, there are many public rights of way that are disconnected or areas poorly provided for that may not show up in this document.

This information is intended to be used to help provide one source of identification of sites and issues that could potentially be addressed through different approaches. This could be linking routes to avoid or provide an alternative to road use or make road crossings safer, or routes that connect people to each other or their local facilities. These could be standalone projects or schemes that are linked to an area's Local Development Framework, integrated transport strategy, green infrastructure strategy or specific developments that arise.

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ROWIP improvement suggestions

AA_additional access needed	(5)
C_crossing needed	(44)
D_potential disabled route	(11)
DA_stile or k/g removal would help	(70)
DB_surface improvements would help	(70)
LRB_linking route bridleway	(25)
LRF_linking route footpath	(98)
M_missing route on map	(12)
MRB_missing bridleway	(8)
MRF_missing route footpath	(44)
R_redundant furniture	(12)
SC_safe route to school	(15)
SI_signing needed	(122)
SS_status upgrade needed	(17)
V_increased vegetation clearance needed	(66)
X_path not used	(16)