

# Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum

Second meeting of 2021/22  
*Remote meeting conducted through MSTeams® due to Covid precautions*  
**Wednesday 17 November 2021**  
**10am - 12pm**

## **AGENDA**

2021 (2)

<b>Time</b>	<b>Item number</b>	<b>Item</b>
09:50	0	<i>Teams® meeting activated. Please test your connection and video/call settings</i>
<b>10am</b>	1	Welcome from Secretary and declarations of interest
	2	Extended member introductions - up to 3 minutes per member to explain their area(s) of interest and what their priorities are with regard to access to the countryside and public rights of way.
<b>10.40</b>	3	Confirm the minutes of 24 <sup>th</sup> June 2021
	4	Matters Arising from minutes and related updates
<b>10.50</b>	5	Access Strategy & Development report and space for discussion
<b>11.20</b>	6	Future meetings, plans and agenda – what do members want?
<b>11.30</b>	7	Space for AOB
<b>11.40</b>	8	Confirm date, time and location of future meetings  18 May 2022 16 November 2022  All usually 9.45 for 10am location hopefully County Hall or Sutton Farm

*n.b. all times are indicative only*

This meeting is open to OCAF Members and supporting officers only, for privacy reasons. The meeting will be recorded for minute taking purposes only. No recording will be retained.

Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum is a Local Access Forum – a statutory independent advisory body, established and administered by Oxfordshire County Council to assist with improving access to Oxfordshire's countryside under s94 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Contact any member via the OCAF Secretariat: Oxfordshire County Council, Countryside Area, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Speedwell House, Speedwell Street, Oxford OX1 1NE Tel 01865 810226, email: [paul.harris@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:paul.harris@oxfordshire.gov.uk) or visit

[www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ocaf](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ocaf)

## unconfirmed

### OXFORDSHIRE COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS FORUM

MINUTES OF THE FIRST MEETING OF 2021/22  
Thursday 24 June 2021, online Teams® meeting

2021 (1)

#### Attending: Members

John Griffin (Chair) Philip Chamberlain (PC) Ilse Lambert (IL) Rachel Livingstone (RL)  
Anne Luttmann-Johnson (ALJ) Sarah Martin (SM)

#### Oxfordshire County Council Officers attending to support OCAF:

Hugh Potter (HP) - Group Manager Countryside Operations and Volunteer Coordination  
Paul Harris (PH) - OCAF Secretary/Principal Officer Public Rights of Way Access Strategy

- 1. Welcome, apologies and declarations.** In the absence of Chair and Vice-chair, John Griffin volunteered to chair the meeting, proposed by PC and seconded by SM. Chair welcomed members and officers to the meeting. Apologies received from Gordon, Dave and Matthew. No declarations
- 2. Annual election/re-election of Chair and Vice-chair.** Matthew Judson was proposed as Chair by John Griffin and seconded by SM. Elected in his absence. No proposals/nominations were received for Vice-chair. The Chair expressed the thanks of the group to Stuart McGinness for his work chairing the group for a number of years, representing the views of young people and mountain biking, and wished him the very best for the future.
- 3. Confirm minutes from meeting 49 – 18<sup>th</sup> November 2020.** Confirmed as correct
- 4. Matters arising.** No outstanding actions. IL asked if Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) notices were sent to the Oxfordshire branch of the Trail Riders Fellowship (TRF). HP undertook to check and ensure this change was made.

PC requested that all abbreviations and acronyms are spelt out in full when used for the first time in minutes and papers. This was agreed to

*Managing Vehicles* – IL advised that she couldn't access the Wiltshire link and asked about progress in Oxfordshire for publicising access restrictions. HP replied that following the cross-team meeting to find a solution to TRO publicity he was under the impression that this was being actioned and would follow this up. IL referred to the forthcoming online map of byways and unclassified roads that the TRF was putting together as a means for members to know which routes had some kind of restriction on them and to enable better planning with benefits to local tourism. RL asked how Other Routes with Public Access (ORPAs) were being shown on this online map as their public or private status may not be clear. IL said that the definitive map and other sources were checked to find restrictions along with the List of Streets and in some cases checking on-ground signage. If there was a doubt about lawful vehicle use then the routes would not go online. IL added that the map wasn't public yet and would be available to TRF members earlier and with more detail than the public version.

PC asked that when reports used local names for particular rights of way such as Cornhill Lane they should also have some location detail added. He also stated that as a landowner if a map went public with routes that he wasn't aware about it may cause a sticking point and prior notification may assist in reducing any risk of slight perturbation. IL responded that these were not new routes and were already on the Ordnance Survey (OS) maps which landowners should be familiar with. HP advised that maps of maintainable highways and public rights of way and were available online at <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/roads-and-transport/street-maintenance-z/highways-register> and <https://publicrightsofway.oxfordshire.gov.uk/>

## unconfirmed

There were no comments on the promoted routes note.

**Action1: Hugh Potter** to check Oxfordshire Trail Riders Fellowship are on the relevant consultation and notification lists

**Action 2: Hugh Potter** to check with Tom Scholes about the progress of Traffic Regulation Order publicity

5. **Local Transport & Connectivity Plan (LTCP) draft policies:** PH introduced the item advising that the three draft policies were part of suite of 30+ policies that were being developed and refined into a single document with accompanying context-setting text before the draft was issued for consultation.

PC noted that in green infrastructure, access and habitats may not be wholly mutually compatible and often public access doesn't work, for example with dogs and ground nesting birds on arable field plots. Chair suggested that the general thrust of both greenways and green infrastructure policies was to find a way forward. PH gave brief explanation of greenways concept where routes were more likely to be enclosed by hedges and probably away from arable fields. There was no intention to make all public rights of way into greenways. PC suggested that this could be a good opportunity to introduce access as a public good. RL stated that it was important to note that new greenways near housing developments are valuable and that non-asphalt surfaces may be more beneficial to wildlife as they involve less habitat removal. Chair asked if there was a clear enough distinction between commuter and leisure routes. PH replied that there may be some overlap between commuting and leisure use on greenways. SM suggested that restrictions on dogs should be included and PH answered that at this stage, although dogs can cause issues, it was probably better to not include negative text in the policy areas.

IL said that she loved the idea of family riding routes but was worried that the wider tracks may carry higher rights as byways and there could be threats to motorcycle and 4x4 access if these are converted to greenways. She suggested there was a fine balance and it was important to be able to share the countryside between all users. PH set out to reassure her that the Icknield Greenway had only had vehicle restrictions imposed because of the engineering and safety constraints rather than following an ideology of banning motor vehicles. He added that there was no automatic presumption within OCC that motor vehicle use was not compatible with shared use routes.

Chair noted that the LTCP had lots of aspirations and commitments but there were significant challenges when new developments came forward. PH responded that there were active travel and environmental policies made by district and county councils which developers had to abide by, including the LTCP, and he sought onsite and offsite provision for public rights of way. ALJ referred to her village neighbourhood plan which included a fifty-page green infrastructure section. The village were keen to have a cycle route to the railway station but it wasn't clear where the cycle connections were being considered, for example to the new Eynsham park and ride which she felt seemed to be a massive car park. The words were welcomed but the strategy needs to act on its words and make the connections on the ground. The Chair summarised matters that the policies needed to deliver better rights of way and improvements, and perhaps the forum should now wait until the consultation emerged. RL noted that younger generations needed to be encouraged and supported to access the countryside and travel by bike as these are the people who will look after the countryside in the future. Chair agreed with this sentiment adding that it was not helped when longer term needs end up changed over the short term.

6. **Future meetings.** SM commented that in-person meetings are essential going forward. Chair agreed and added that site visits would be good to see works on the ground. SM said that part of the Lower Icknield Way bridleway between Berrick Salome and Warborough was very hard to use all year as it was too boggy in winter and too rutted in summer. RL said that surfaces were getting appalling all across the county, but nothing appeared to be being done. HP replied that the paths had received much greater levels of use over the past 12 months with new types of user. He urged members and their groups to keep reporting and they would try to improve key routes. More rainfall

## unconfirmed

and minimal maintenance may have been acceptable when there were low numbers of users as routes could recover, but increased use and wetter weather meant less opportunity for recovery and problems that continue over into summer. The authority was being led by a new "Fair Deal for Oxfordshire" Alliance who have made it clear that green issues would be a priority for the next four years. HP noted that the public rights of way team had been operating on the same annual budget figure since 2012 and could do so much more with more budget, contractors and staff. RL reported that the downpours have created massive impacts as the water doesn't percolate through the soil. HP said that paths need drainage and regrading which is why reporting is needed so the size of the challenge is known. Chair questioned what a key route was and said that it shouldn't be based on current use, and instead should include the potential of a route.

In terms of a work programme, Chair suggested that this was up to OCAF members to go away and think about as the ball was in OCAF's court.

- 7. AOB.** PH referred to the Oxfordshire Strategic Railfreight Interchange proposal near Ardley and junction 10 of the M40 motorway. He said he had had some early input and had requested a walking, cycling and horseriding assessment and review to be undertaken.

PC asked if anything was happening on the east/west rail corridor. PH replied that nothing was currently being progressed.

RL referred to a development where Bellway Homes had reinstated an old kissing gate which was non-compliant with current accessibility standards and meant a wheelchair user had to make a significant diversion. HP asked if the countryside access officer had been involved and undertook to speak to her and get back to RL.

**Action 3: Hugh Potter** to speak to Katie Walther about possible non-compliant kissing gate

- 8. Date and time of next meetings**

Chair identified that more members were needed. He said that production of an annual report may help attract members as well as being something of note by parish councils.

It was suggested that a site visit could be separated from formal meeting to keep arrangements simple and easier to manage. The next formal meeting is mid-November but it could be Thursday 18 or Wednesday 17 in the afternoon. Chair and Secretary to confirm.

Chair thanked all for attending and members thanked JC for standing in as Chair

Meeting ended 3.45pm

# Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum (OCAF) November 2021

## Public Rights of Way Access Strategy & Development update

This is a short update for OCAF attendees about access strategy and development matters.

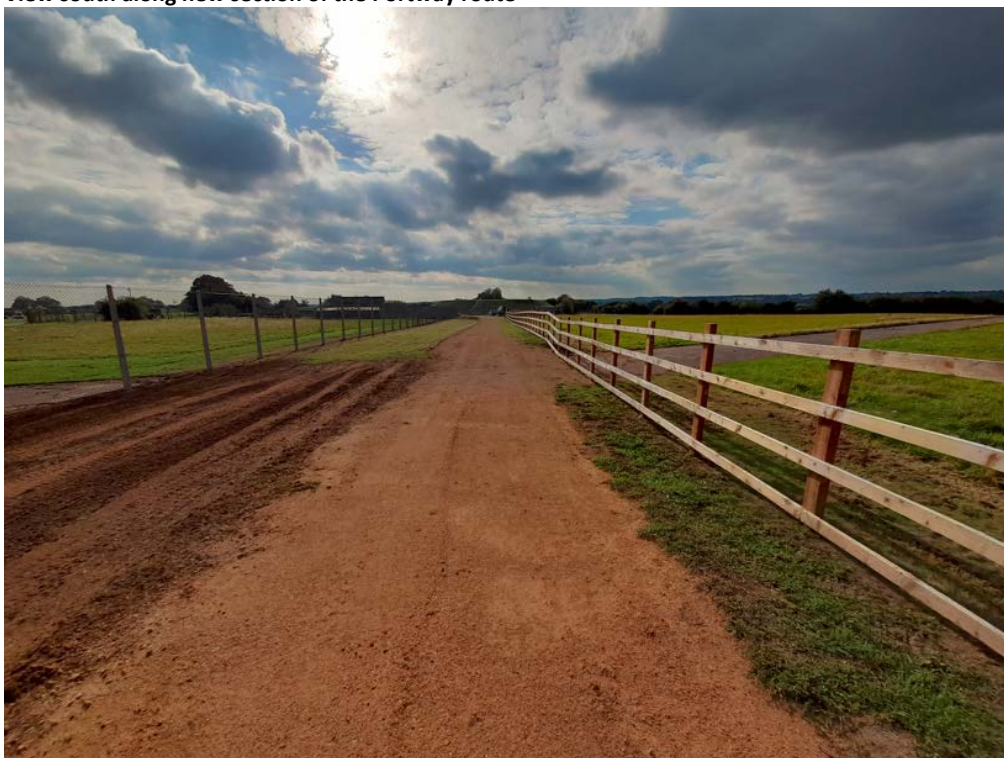
### **COP26 and the Rights of Way Management Plan**

It cannot have escaped anyone's attention that there is a significant focus on efforts to galvanise action to address climate change, currently through the mechanism of the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) and UK Governments Net Zero Strategy 'Build Back Greener'. The current Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) that in Oxfordshire we call a management plan, is almost seven years old and contains some content relevant to COP26. The sections about the RoWIP and transport, health & wellbeing and green infrastructure/biodiversity are appended to this note as a reminder. This content doesn't mean that public rights of way and its management and development can sit back – there is always a challenge to do things better, to maintain and build more sustainably, to use resources more effectively, and to ensure more people can easily walk, cycle and ride public rights of way and other routes instead of using private motor vehicles. Going forward, the RoWIP is due to be renewed in 2024 and it is likely that as part of the review commencing in 2022/23, even more focus will be made on environmental aspects and aspirations within the plan. OCAF's early discussion and participation in this review is important to officers.

### **Ex RAF Upper Heyford - "Portway" bridleway**

After more than a decade of discussions, changes and planning applications I am pleased to say that this route across the airfield is very nearly open. It has been constructed as a part stone and part grass 10m corridor through the airfield and is just awaiting the bridleway dedication agreement to be signed. As part of this and using some of the developer contributions we hold, OCC contracted in Aztec Plant to construct a similar spec route on the southern section so that residents and visitors of Heyford Village have a good route to the runway viewing area from the pavements in Camp Road.

**View south along new section of the Portway route**





View north from old section of the Portway route with new surfacing looking into airfield route.



Unfortunately, the reinstatement of **Aves Ditch** on the east side of the flying field is a different matter and we are working hard to negotiate good terms for a new legal agreement connected with the much larger commercial and residential development. When approved this site will eventually provide a signalised crossing of the 5-way road junction along with a high quality through route bridleway and a number of connections – including a **multi-user £1.2m greenway** type route to Bicester through the Ardley energy recovery facility site and linking to the Bicester Eco-Town development area. More on this as plans firm up but we are speaking to Sustrans to try and get the early technical work completed as they are experienced in this area of work.

### **Local Transport & Connectivity Plan (LTCP)**

The development of this Policy keeps moving forward with the OCC Cabinet approval on 19<sup>th</sup> October, of the LTCP document and supporting strategies as the basis for public consultation starting in December 2021 for a 6-10 week period. The Place and Overview Scrutiny Committee has asked to see the proposed consultation questions. More detail including the current draft document and supporting papers can be found here at item 10 <https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=115&MId=6381&Ver=4>, but note that the look of the documents and the way consultation questions are run will change. As this consultation will take place in between OCAF meetings it is suggested that a separate working group is formed - or comments sent by email. Overall the target for adoption of the LTCP is in Spring 2022, plus there is further work needed to develop supporting strategies and plans – many of which will be relevant to public rights of way.

### **Oxfordshire Strategic Rail Freight Interchange, Ardley**

As mentioned at the last meeting, this national infrastructure scheme is moving forwards through the various early stage of planning. There will be significant changes to public rights of way, but we are confident that replacement routes will take account of existing bridleways and footpaths as well as the ones access strategy is meant to be creating to connect Heyford and Ardley development sites and communities. It is also anticipated that

the replacement routes will mostly be located in landscape corridors to retain some level of amenity and connection with nature. Work on route details will restart once road and rail locations are finalised. In terms of connecting and through routes, our intention is to avoid creating new routes which would then be removed as the development proceeds, but we do want to provide some level of access in the shorter term between Ardley, Heyford and Bicester to improve and network and in case the terminal does not proceed. This will probably mean choosing reasonably direct routes that have less risk of being affected by the terminal and access roads, and/or that have less construction work needed so there is less waste if they have to be stopped up.

### **Other major planning matters**

The county has a significant amount of large-scale development in hand or coming forward which are a combination of housing, commercial/industrial and transport schemes. Access officers work to meet the aims of the RoWIP by protecting and enhancing existing access as much as possible and securing appropriate alternatives where this isn't, gaining higher status upgrades and new routes, securing funds for offsite mitigation and working at the policy and strategy level to ensure high level awareness and consideration. Some key recent areas of interest include:

- Bayswater Brook, north of the new Barton development site in Oxford
- Housing Infrastructure Fund transport schemes around Didcot and Witney
- West Eynsham Strategic Development Area and Cotswolds Garden Village
- Large minerals and waste sites
- Dalton Barracks
- Chalgrove Airfield and linked bypass schemes
- Grove North
- Hobbyhorse lane, Sutton Courtenay
- Wallingford Road, Cholsey
- Bretch Hill, Banbury

Plus hundreds of smaller 'major' applications of all types, and the follow up legal and negotiation aspects, some of which take many years to conclude.

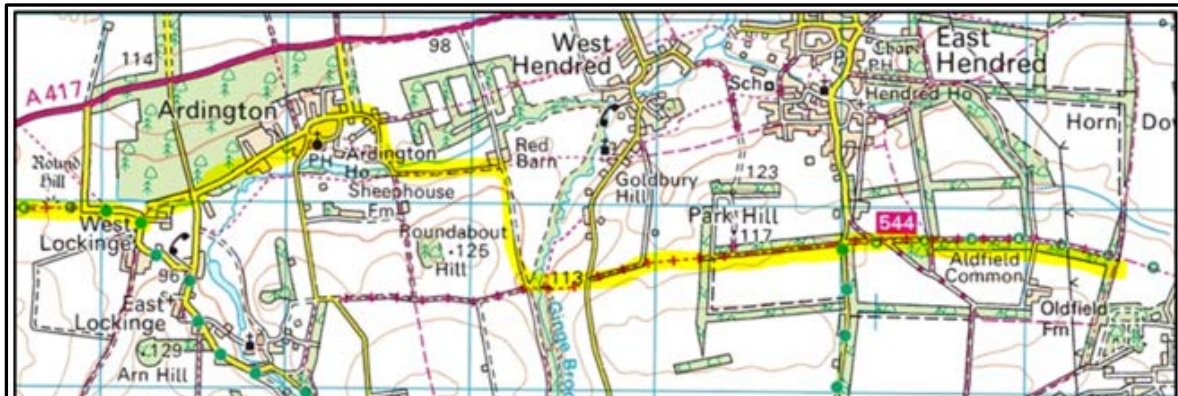
### **S106 funds for PRow access mitigation measures**

As identified at the last meeting, OCC Access Strategy controls a significant sum of banked developer contributions for spend in specific locations around the county. The previous note referenced the likely use of external project consultant, but we have reconsidered this approach. A business case has been submitted for approval to run each scheme as a delegated capital scheme with a range of procurement options – from purchase order for smaller value schemes to issuing tenders for higher value work. We are also keeping open the possibility of entering into delivery partnerships with suitable organisations as well as internal delivery where possible. Additional funding has been secured for an access development officer for the team to lead on landowner negotiations for the schemes and it is hoped recruitment can begin shortly.

### **The Icknield Greenway – remedial works**

This route opened early in 2021 as a promoted 'greenway' route between Wantage and Harwell Campus using minor roads, existing cycle tracks, footpath upgraded to bridleway, a new bridleway, and parts of the Icknield Way Restricted Byway and Byway. The Icknield Greenway achieves a full shared use route for walkers and horse-riders as well as cyclists. Unlike the other improved cycle routes in the Science Vale the new surfaces on rights of way sections have been designed for lower-speed leisure commuting journeys with mainly a compacted stone surface so horse access isn't compromised.

This approach to surfacing and the quality of the surfacing on the ground has caused some safety and use concerns from regular cyclists, especially regarding uneven and loose stone surfaces, and there has been a level of demand for the installation of a sealed or bound smooth surface. In order to address safety matters the project lead commissioned remedial work during the autumn that included mechanical sweeping of loose gravel/stones and increased compaction of surfaces. A small number of trees have been removed and some pothole damage repaired. This work is more or less complete and feedback from regular users shows that satisfaction has increased but there are still some concerns and request for sealed/bound surface in places – including the steeper approaches to the Ginge Brook crossing. There is no budget for this and the request is being resisted on landscape, landowner perspective and overall need grounds, but the situation is being kept under review.



#### Lastly

Whilst enjoying a recent family trip to Bosham Harbour I found this rather good use of humour for managing litter!



Paul Harris

Principal Officer Public Rights of Way Access Strategy & Development

Oxfordshire County Council | Environment & Heritage Team | Place & Growth Directorate

[www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/countrysideaccess](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/countrysideaccess)



## ii. The RoWMP and the Local Transport Plan

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

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

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

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

- **Strategic Objective 10: Improve public health and wellbeing by increasing levels of walking and cycling, reducing transport emissions, reducing casualties, and enabling inclusive access to jobs, education and services** - This is the key strategic link between the two plans. Walkers, cyclists and equestrians are all vulnerable road users and may be affected by vehicle speed, frequency and driver behaviour. These factors should be addressed as part of the LTP. The rights of way and countryside access network is free to use and plays an important role in giving opportunities for physical activity for walkers, cyclists and equestrians.
- **Strategic Objective 3: Reduce the proportion of journeys made by private car by making the use of public transport, walking and cycling more attractive** - A good local rights of way network in urban areas can provide attractive alternatives to car use for short to medium local journeys to work, school and local facilities, and for longer recreational trips, especially at weekends. Often this can tie into public transport provision.
- **Strategic Objective 4: Maintain and improve transport connections to support economic growth and vitality across the county** - A well-maintained local rights of way network can form part of a journey to neighbourhood services like schools, surgeries, bus stops, green spaces, railway stations and shops for residents and visitors.



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

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

### iii. The RoWMP, health and wellbeing

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

#### **What are the benefits of physical activity?**

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

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

#### **What are the recommended levels of physical activity?**

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

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

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



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

#### **Physical activity and access to the countryside**

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

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

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

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

**What type of activity takes place in Oxfordshire?**

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

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

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

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

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

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



**Volunteers installing gate ( Howard Dell)**

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

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



## vi. The RoWMP, Green Infrastructure and biodiversity

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

### ***Why is Green Infrastructure important?***

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

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

### ***Green Infrastructure and economic growth***

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

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

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

(Defra, 2011)

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

### ***Biodiversity***

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

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



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

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

Examples of practice and advice given include:

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



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