

Oxfordshire County Council

# **Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2006-2011**

Assessment of Need – *Full Version*

January 2006

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## Methodology for the assessment of need

18. Section 60(2) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 specifies which matters should be assessed by the local highway authority in the production of its Rights of Way Improvement Plan:
  - a. the extent to which local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public,
  - b. the opportunities provided by local rights of way for exercise and other forms of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the authority's area,
  - c. the accessibility of local rights of way to blind or partially sighted persons and others with mobility problems, and
  - d. such other matters as the Secretary of State may direct.
  
19. Government's statutory guidance for RoWIPs sets out the six step process that local highway authorities should take in assessing the extent to which local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public:
  - a. study the definitive map and statement of rights of way;
  - b. collate and consider data on applications for modifications to the map and statement;
  - c. collate and consider data on requests for improvements to the network;
  - d. collate and consider data on the condition of the network
  - e. undertake a survey to assess the nature and scale of the present and likely future needs of the public (both local people and visitors to the area) in relation to the rights of way network; and
  - f. identify any other relevant information, including other plans and strategies for the area
  
20. Oxfordshire County Council has adhered to legislative requirements and has also tried to follow the guidance in the preparation of this part of the RoWIP. However the presentation of information within the assessment of need differs from the above layout in order to follow a more useful and logical order. Firstly, we show why the rights of way network benefits users, then what access is available in Oxfordshire, what users and organisations think about this access, and finally, how we manage this access. For each of the key issues a link to the appropriate aim in the statement of action is provided.
  
21. For reasons of readability and space within the printed RoWIP, the final plan contains a condensed assessment of need, so some of the sections' page numbering on this full version will differ. Paragraph numbers remain the same apart from paras 30(a-h), 46a, 53(a-c), 55(a –dd) and 61(a-c)

## **Section 1 - The potential opportunities provided by local rights of way for exercise and other forms of open-air recreation and enjoyment**

22. Oxfordshire is an outstanding place in which to live, work and visit. The public rights of way network forms an integral part of this living landscape. Put simply, a well-maintained and well-marked network, with information and improvements that meet the needs of users and potential users, offers almost unlimited potential for our residents and visitors to enjoy Oxfordshire's unique countryside. Particular opportunities include:

- Tourism & Economy
- Health & Social
- Transportation

### **1.1 Tourism and Economy opportunities**

23. Oxfordshire is a mainly rural county. Seventy percent of its area of 1,007 square miles is devoted to agriculture. Almost 75 percent of the county is designated as Area of Outstanding Beauty, Area of High Landscape Value or Green Belt (Audit Commission, 2003), which means that there is an extremely rich and diverse variety of countryside within Oxfordshire. This includes the Cotswolds Hills to the west, Ironstone Hills to the north, the Chiltern Hills to the south and east and the Berkshire Downs to the south. The River Thames, its tributaries and other more minor rivers and valleys wind their way through the county and the Oxford Canal links to the Coventry Canal at the Hawkesbury Junction. This cultural landscape is a rich resource in terms of tourism by residents, visitors, workers and students within the county, and by visitors from further afield. (Audit Commission, 2001).

24. Of the urban areas, Oxford City is the principal cultural and heritage centre. Other market towns include Abingdon, Banbury, Bicester, Chipping Norton, Henley on Thames, Wantage and Witney. Blenheim Palace is a World Heritage site and the county is well endowed with many other historical, cultural and architectural attractions such as the Henley Regatta, Blenheim Horse Trials, Cotswold Wildlife Park and National Trust properties, all of which draw in millions of visitors.

25. The public rights of way network is the main means of accessing and enjoying the countryside, and contributes to the 'value' of tourist access (Box 1). Often this access is taken directly from urban areas using 'green corridors' or alternatives to private motor vehicles. Knowing that there is an attractive range of accessible countryside in an area can be an attractor in its own right for tourism as well as encouraging more overnight or multi-night stays. The Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) outbreak of 2001 demonstrated the extreme side of what can happen to local enterprises when this often taken for granted resource is no longer available or when the countryside is perceived as being inaccessible.

### **Box 1: The value of tourism and countryside access**

Tourism is a vital part of the south east economy with spending estimated at £10 billion per year and a full time equivalent (FTE) workforce of 290,000. Within Oxfordshire the total value of UK residents and overseas resident spend was £499 million in 2002. This benefit is distributed more evenly through the season for UK residents but shows greater peaks in the summer season (April-Sept) for overseas residents (Tourism South East, 2004).

Christie and Matthews (2003) used existing national and regional research and information such as Audit Commission data, National Rights of Way Condition Survey and UK Day Visitors Survey (UKDVS) to review the economic and social value of walking. They found that:

- Over 527 million estimated walking trips are made annually to the English Countryside
- The income generated from these trips is estimated to be between £1.4 billion and £2.7 billion and supports between 180,559 and 245,560 FTE jobs

Despite their estimated costs of £69.2 million necessary to restore the existing path network to an acceptable standard for public use, plus another £18.55 million per year to maintain the network **they concluded that the total benefits from walking are greatly in excess of the costs of path restoration and maintenance**

Data for equestrian and cycle economic benefits are not so comprehensively documented. Cycle use is lower; the 1996 UKDVS estimated that 32% of the population own a bicycle and at least one bicycle is available to 50% of homes. Approximately 17 million (30%) of the population ride occasionally. However, within Oxford and in immediate surrounds these figures are likely to be much greater. Horse ownership is generally much lower than bicycle ownership and use, except in particular 'hotspots' around equestrian riding and stabling centres and in certain parts of the Vale and West Oxfordshire districts. A 1996 survey by the British Equestrian Trades Association estimated that 1% of the national population are horse owners and 3.8% are occasional horse riders. Tourism South East and Cheshire County Council cite the BHS national 2001 estimate of 2.4 million people (4.5%) taking part in riding regularly. This increase would suggest that horse use is increasing. Equestrian activity can be seen as a particularly high spending sector, despite lower levels of use, because of the nature and expense of keeping live animals safely. This can have major positive impacts on the local economy through stabling, servicing and equipment suppliers. In addition there is a developing market for walking, cycling and horse-riding 'package' type holidays.

**KEY ISSUE 1: Countryside access has the potential to play an important strategic and local role in generating and sustaining the local economy as well as delivering other economic benefits such as reducing car use. However there is no specific investment with regard to these aspects in relation to the core resourcing of the network's management and development. The experience and satisfaction of residents and visitors is directly attributable to the investment that is made in the maintenance, information and promotion of the entire countryside access network, and how local rights of way are perceived and integrated with tourism, local enterprises and local transport networks.**

AIM 1-4

## 1.2 Health and Social opportunities

26. Despite the Nation having a more sedentary lifestyle, studies show that 30 minutes of moderate or vigorous activity, five days per week can reduce the chance of heart disease by 30%. It can also reduce the risk of diabetes by 50%. Walking as a low-impact form of exercise can also reduce the risk of strokes, osteoporosis, high blood pressure, bowel cancer, Alzheimer's disease, arthritis, anxiety and stress. In addition regular walking can improve a person's well-being by increasing confidence, stamina, energy, weight control and life expectancy (Walking the Way to Health Initiative, 2004). All of these factors have direct and indirect economic benefits for the individual, the local highway authority, the health authority and the community.
27. The first 'Health Walks' project was set up by Dr William Bird, a GP at Sonning Common in Oxfordshire. The aim of the project was to improve peoples' fitness and well-being by encouraging them to use their local countryside for walking. This project has now been taken up nationally and within Oxfordshire there are currently 14 schemes benefiting many hundreds of people. Sonning Common health centre have extend the scheme even further by running '*Health Cycles*' and a '*Green Gym*' to benefit peoples' health even further. In addition, local groups such as the Cotswold AONB Voluntary Wardens, Ramblers' Association, Chiltern Society and the 'Second Lease' walking club provide these benefits through their group's activities, and many also undertake voluntary maintenance work on Oxfordshire's rights of way as well. Outside of these schemes, groups and individuals able to easily access the countryside should be more likely to partake in informal recreation on a regular basis.
28. Oxfordshire's residents are relatively wealthy. However there are still a significant number of residents and visitors who may be excluded from making use of Oxfordshire's countryside because of information, perception or physical provision factors. This includes members of the public who do not have any impairment, as exclusion can occur when the rights of way are not managed well.
29. Oxfordshire has a population of 626,000 of whom around 40 per cent are younger than 16 or older than 60. Overall, the proportion of older people is increasing. The ethnic minority community population is 3.3 per cent compared with a national figure of 5.5 per cent. This rises to 10.5 per cent in Oxford (source Audit Commission, 2001). There are also 23,000 'Blue Badge' parking permit holders in the county who will have some sort of mobility impairment. Many of these users require additional provision, in order to make the countryside more accessible and enjoyable.

**KEY ISSUE 2: The countryside has an important role to play in improving peoples' health and social life. This can have real economic and 'inclusiveness' benefits to the individual, the local authority and the community. Countrywide health walks schemes are only a small part of the actual use of the network, and show the sheer potential that could be realised if the whole of the rights of way network was properly defined, maintained and promoted. The overall aim should be to make the countryside as accessible as possible whilst retaining the attributes that stimulate people into wanting to experience it. In order to do that, it is still necessary to ensure that the basic standard of path provision, maintenance and information is increased to such a level that all users can have the confidence to know that they can use the routes that they wish to.**

AIM 1-4

### 1.3 Transportation opportunities - rights of way and the Local Transport Plan

30. Other economic issues concerning residents and visitors relate to transport out into the countryside and for daily journeys. Motor vehicle dependency is choking the towns and countryside and reducing the very qualities that people value in their local area or that which they are visiting. This damages the economy through congestion, pollution, stress and the destruction of peace and quiet. The local rights of way network offers one of the best opportunities to reduce this motor vehicle use especially those short journeys to work, school, local facilities and local walks, provided that it is properly provided and integrated in the local transport network.
- 30.a The predominant means of accessing Oxfordshire's countryside for all forms of user, is by private motor vehicle (OCC, 2001). Although individual access in these vehicles gives choice and the means to get to more remote areas at any time, it can create its own set of problems. These include overcrowding of quiet areas, blocking country lanes and farm accesses, environmental pollution through noise and emissions, plus thefts and vandalism, particularly in popular recreational areas. For these reasons, the council could be influencing behaviour by offering realistic alternatives and mitigating measures for private vehicle use.
- 30.b The type, intensity and frequency of vehicular use will vary according to whether the user is accessing the countryside for utilitarian (e.g. commuting to work or school) or recreational reasons, where they are coming from, whether they are a local, from the county or a visitor from the UK or further afield, and what particular area or attraction they are visiting.
- 30.c The potential solutions to offset or minimise the impact of private motor vehicles are many. These include: increasing or modernising public transport provision and information (including 'dial-a-ride' and community taxi services); developing promoted routes that radiate from local pubs and other facilities (which have parking and toilets, with income-generating potential); working with land managers to enable 'farmyard parking' in safer areas of farms (especially if there are farm shops on-site); supporting the patrolling of sites by wardens; increasing routes that are directly accessible from urban areas or transport interchanges and ensuring that direct access from settlements is optimised.
- 30.d The National Cycle Network (NCN) offers miles of cycle routes on quiet country lanes and traffic-free paths, using easy to follow route signs and connecting towns and villages throughout the UK. These routes inter-connect with cycle lanes and settlements and aim to provide a more integrated network. Within Oxfordshire there are approximately 45 miles cycletracks alongside roads in rural areas and approximately 25 miles of cycletracks away from roads. Key sections on the NCN include Dornford Lane at Woodstock, part of the Salt Way in Banbury, Didcot to Long Wittenham, Didcot to Sutton Courtney, Abbey Close Abingdon to Radley, Sandford Lane to Cowley rail bridge, Oxford, Joe White's Lane and Oxford Canal Towpath, Kidlington to Hampton Poyle, Abingdon to Sunningwell bridleway, and the disused railway track from Didcot to Upton.
- 30.e **Walkers and Cyclists**-These general transportation issues particularly apply to walkers and cyclists. Whereas equestrians tend to house or stable groups of

- animals in dedicated facilities, and ride out from this central area on a daily basis; walkers and cyclists tend to travel directly from their individual houses to the area that they want to enjoy. The exception to this are some organised groups that may often car share or start their walk from a transport interchange which may reduce their impact on the quiet or rural areas.
- 30.f ***Users with disabilities-*** Further consideration needs to be given to those users with disabilities. These users often need direct vehicular access to the countryside, with enough parking space and width so that wheelchairs and other mobility aids can be deployed in safety. Reserved or restricted car parking spaces will usually be needed, and the challenge is protecting these from unauthorised or inconsiderate use. At the White Horse at Uffington for example, it has been observed there are often car drivers without disability who park in the allocated bays because they are more convenient. Without adequate monitoring and enforcement this means a lengthy and uncomfortable route to the attraction, or more likely the abandonment of the day's activity. This could be a role for local volunteers to undertake at peak times. More local routes should mean that people have alternatives to using their car but still be able to enjoy quality experiences.
- 30.g ***Equestrians-*** In general, individual horses are stabled in a group facility within rural or urban fringe areas, so access to and from major urban areas for recreation or commuting is not a major need or concern. However there are problems of transportation arising from the keeper or user of the animal driving in to the stables, and also 'boxing-up' the animal to take for a ride. Of these, the boxing-up is of concern as horseboxes on narrow rural roads can cause traffic flow and congestion problems, as well as a shortage of safe parking areas.
- 30.h The right of horse owners to choose where and when to exercise their animals for utility or recreation is not in question. There may however, be opportunities to provide alternatives, particularly to local vehicle journeys. Improvement planners in Hampshire for example, have evaluated the potential accessible path network from each of the 150 horse stables facilities in an area. Using electronic maps and in discussion with the horse users, they assessed whether there was a network of accessible routes from that facility and how it was used. Areas lacking in provision or with 'put-off' factors such as obstructions or lack of safe road verge links were identified. As part of the RoWIP process, these factors were prioritised according to the likelihood of reducing vehicle journeys, and the increased safety of users. A similar process for the whole of Oxfordshire would be a major undertaking, but similar 'put-off factors' are likely to be already affecting the network. Addressing these would likely significantly affect levels of use and quality of experience for this group of users. A second stage may then examine the access to the stabling facilities themselves in order to encourage non-vehicular means of accessing the stables.

### **The RoWIP and the Local Transport Plan**

31. Government intends that the RoWIP and the Local Transport Plan (LTP) are fully integrated from 2010. However, Oxfordshire County Council has coordinated the production and linking of both plans from 2006. The RoWIP may help meet the strategic objectives in the LTP in the following ways:

32. **To tackle Congestion**: An improved local rights of way network in urban areas would provide alternatives to car use for short local journeys, which place a significant strain on urban road networks. For longer recreational trips, especially at weekends; a dual approach could deliver reductions in congestion. Firstly, improvements to the immediate local rights of way network would enable more direct access to the countryside from settlements to be made, reducing the need to drive to particular or popular areas. Secondly, improvements to public transport provision or linking routes to establishments near to popular destinations could reduce the localised traffic impact at these sites by encouraging people to walk or cycle to the area from a less sensitive location.
33. **To deliver Accessibility and improve Quality of Life**: A high quality, well maintained and protected rights of way network can provide important links to jobs, services and recreational opportunities for people who do not have access to a car or bus service, or who would wish to walk or cycle to these facilities. Many settlements and routes, including the Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails, are made difficult to use because of road, rail and river barriers. Examples of major roads that need improved crossings for walkers, cyclists and equestrians include the M40, A34 and A420. Major rivers and canals that would benefit from improved crossings and access are the River Thames at Bablock Hythe and Shillingford, and the Rivers Windrush, Dorn, Evenlode and Cherwell, and the Oxford Canal.
34. In addition, a number of (individually) small-scale improvements to the network, including path surfacing, road verge mowing, improved gates and bridges, additional linking routes, better signing and increased vegetation clearance, could all make a significant difference to the quality of the local environment and the numbers of people being able to use and enjoy the public rights of way network.
35. **To improve Air Quality**: High quality walking, cycling and riding routes and facilities would enable and encourage the use of non-vehicular transport in vulnerable urban and rural locations.
36. **To reduce safety problems**: An unsafe road environment can deter walkers, cyclists and equestrians from choosing to take part in these activities directly from their settlements. Improvements to the rights of way network, in particular the creation of facilities for safer road, rail and river crossings, and the creation of additional or alternative routes, can be combined to make a better experience for users and increase the choices available to people for utilitarian and recreational journeys. Where there is no alternative to using roads, then the authority should consider traffic management measures, such as warning signage, barriers and improved verge/hedge cutting to increase drivers' awareness and responsible behaviour towards walkers, cyclists and equestrians. These users can also be encouraged to ensure that they are highly visible to motorised vehicle users when using roads.
37. **To improve the street environment**: The urban rights of way network offers the opportunity for car free journeys within a settlement. Many of these rights of way could be improved by surfacing, lighting or landscaping work to provide a safer environment that will encourage people to use the routes. For example, since 2004, the Countryside Service and Oxfordshire Highways have joined forces (using LTP funds) to improve a small number of village and town paths each year that are unsurfaced and in poor condition, and replaced the paths with asphalt

surfaces – a significant benefit for local residents and the future maintenance of the route.

**KEY ISSUE 3: The LTP and the RoWIP have a number of shared goals. Improvements to the rights of way network may help in meeting the LTP's objectives.**

**The individual's choice and ability to access the countryside by private car should be considered in relation to the negative factors of car use. These include overcrowding and congestion, environmental pollution, theft and vandalism. OCC and partners can help influence behaviour by offering realistic local solutions that encourage alternative travel. This includes making routes easily accessible from centres of population, more joined up, and with safer road and river crossings, or routes accessible by public transport. In addition, OCC can encourage an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding between motorised and more vulnerable road and road-verge users, providing alternative provision where these are necessary and desirable, and ensuring there is increased provision for the socially excluded.**

AIM 1-4

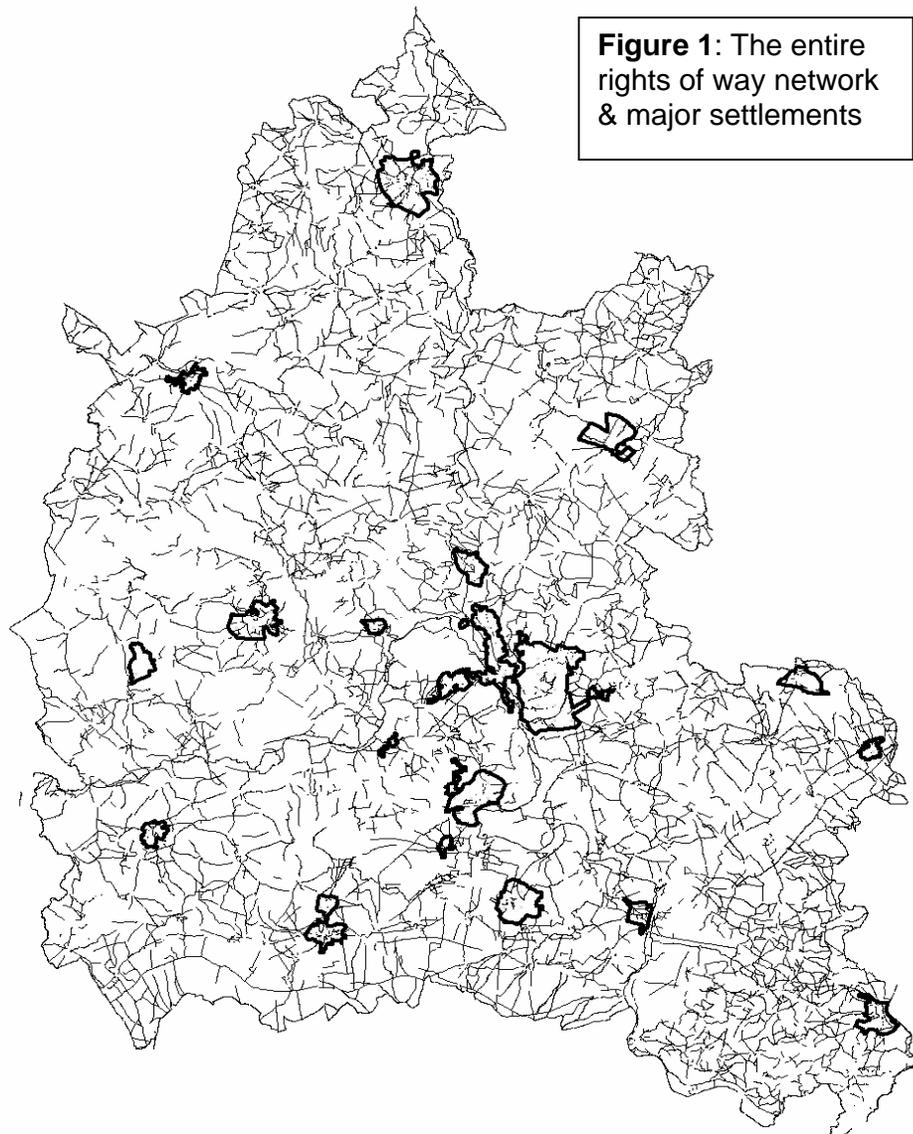
## Section 2: The extent to which local rights of way and other access resources meet the present and likely future needs of the public

### 2.1 Network adequacy - study of the Definitive Map and Statement

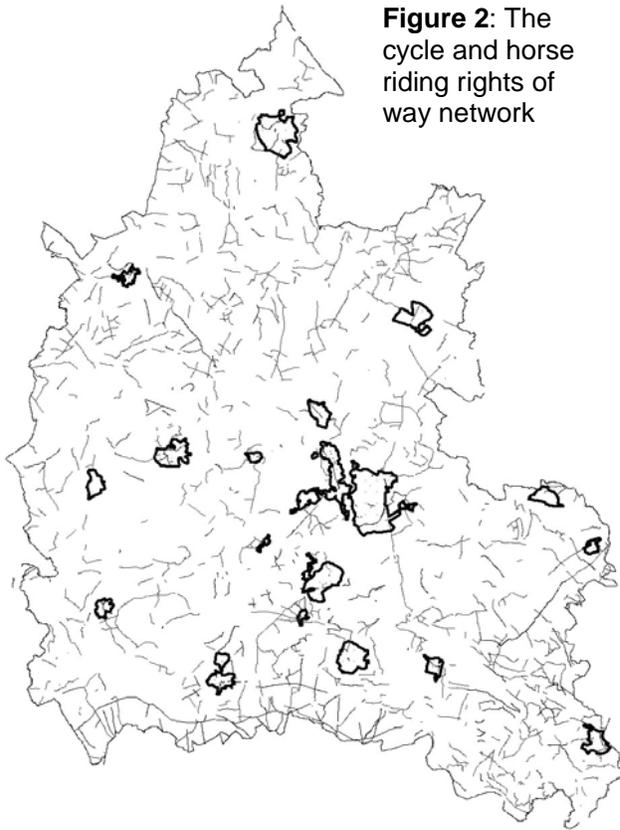
#### 2.1.1 Availability of the network to different classes of user

38. Access to Oxfordshire's countryside is predominantly achieved through the 2,500 mile public rights of way network. Thus according to the paths' recorded status:

**Walkers** should be able to use all 2500 miles (4100km) or 100% of the network, Figure 1

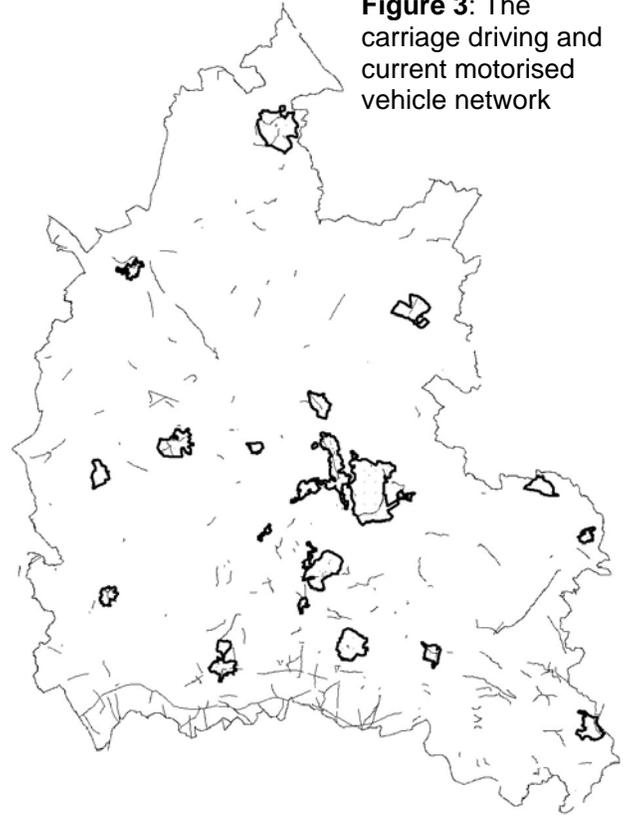


**Horse riders and cyclists** should be able to use 840 miles (1400km) or 33% of the network, Figure 2

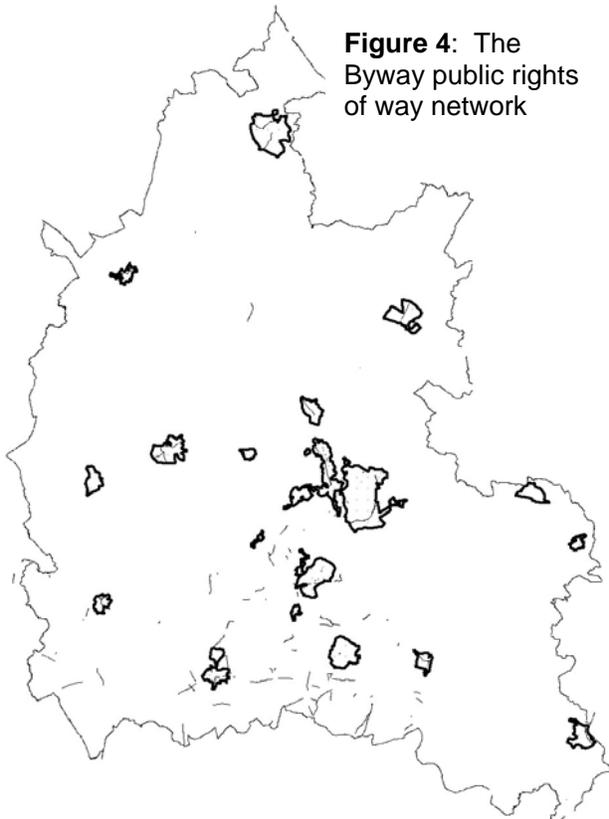


**Figure 2:** The cycle and horse riding rights of way network

**Horse carriage drivers** should be able to use 190 miles (320km) or 7.7% of the network, Figure 3



**Figure 3:** The carriage driving and current motorised vehicle network



**Figure 4:** The Byway public rights of way network

**Motorised users** should be legally entitled to use 40 miles (66km) of Byways Open To All Traffic (1.6% of network), Figure 4, with uncertain rights on another 150 miles (250km) of Roads used as Public Paths (RUPP) (6.1% of network), Figure 3.

RUPPs will change to 'Restricted Byways' and so motorised users will be unable to use these without lawful authority (expected in 2006).

**However all of these figures must be taken in the context of a sometimes disjointed, fragmented and obstructed network.**

## 2.1.2 Areas deficient in rights of way and suggestions for improvements

39. The rights of way network has evolved over many hundreds of years, and continues to evolve today. It is not a planned network and, although it is similar in length to the county roads network, there is less connectivity between individual rights of way, and people in settlements are not always able to access a right of way and enjoy a decent amount of traffic-free or quiet countryside. Even from a glance at the network diagrams it can be seen that the distribution and density of the network differs widely between different areas of the county and especially for the different user types.
40. We have not yet undertaken a thorough analysis of the adequacy of access as suggested in the statutory guidance. This is because the Countryside Service is working to produce a revised Definitive Map and Statement (DMS) during 2006, with an electronic version, initially for internal use. We intend to use this as the basis for the assessment of the whole network as the guidance suggests, plus the non rights of way access (including that shown in the next section). In addition, it should be possible to include footways, cycletracks and 'white roads' (unclassified and unsurfaced County Roads) in the assessment too. This assessment would cover access for walkers, cyclists, equestrians, users with disabilities, and motorised users and will be a far more time-efficient than using paper maps. We will be able to 'zoom in' on different status paths' access to and from settlements, tourist attractions and 'missing' areas. This is current 'best practice' in a number of local authorities, including those involved in the national RoWIP exemplar programme. This should be able to be done using existing resources within the first year of the RoWIP.
41. In the meantime, respondents to the various phases of our RoWIP consultations have provided some very detailed comments. Forty seven local councils have made over 500 suggestions for improvements to existing paths, as well as suggestions for potential new routes (Box 2). The large number and the sheer variety of suggestions, from less than one fifth of local councils, demonstrate the extent and complexity of the demands that are currently unmet on the existing network. These will need to be mapped alongside the existing access as part of the first year's assessment.

Box 2: Potential access improvements in Oxfordshire (results from local councils), response to RoWIP scoping survey 2003.

**Issues** (Some responses have multiple issues per entry)

- Routes & improvements to enable and encourage more people to access the countryside – **171**
- Routes & Improvements to join up the countryside access network – **130**
- Routes & Improvements that enable better access for all – **126**
- Routes & Improvements to paths affected by transport corridors – **41**
- Routes & Improvements to link people to local facilities – **19**
- Paths no longer needed – **13**
- Routes & Improvements to link people to public transport – **2**
- Routes & Improvements to link people to attractions – **1**

42. The Ramblers' Association too, amongst others have made some specific suggestions (Box 3). They are keen to point out there are many more

improvements that they would be happy to see across the county. They feel that these are indicative of the kind of deficiencies that Oxfordshire County Council must address if anything resembling genuine improvement is to be attained. Add these to the suggestions made by local councils and other bodies, plus those in areas who did not respond, and the true extent of this demand emerges. The real challenge here is building the capacity within the whole Countryside Service so that the authority can respond adequately to these local residents' and visitors expressions of need.

### **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

### 2.1.3 Applications for changes to the network

43. The County Council maintains a register of Definitive Map Modification Orders and Public Path Orders on its website at [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/countryside](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/countryside). At January 2006 there were 83 DMMO applications and 47 PPO applications, at various stages. It is anticipated that these applications will be included in the electronic assessment. Section 3.3 contains more details about these procedures.

## 2.2 Network adequacy - The 'whole access' network

44. The RoWIP should consider the whole range of access opportunities as well as those recorded on the Definitive Map and Statement (DMS) when looking at what is available. 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 potential for countryside access and recreation.
45. **New 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:

#### **Open Country (downland)**

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

#### **Registered Common Land**

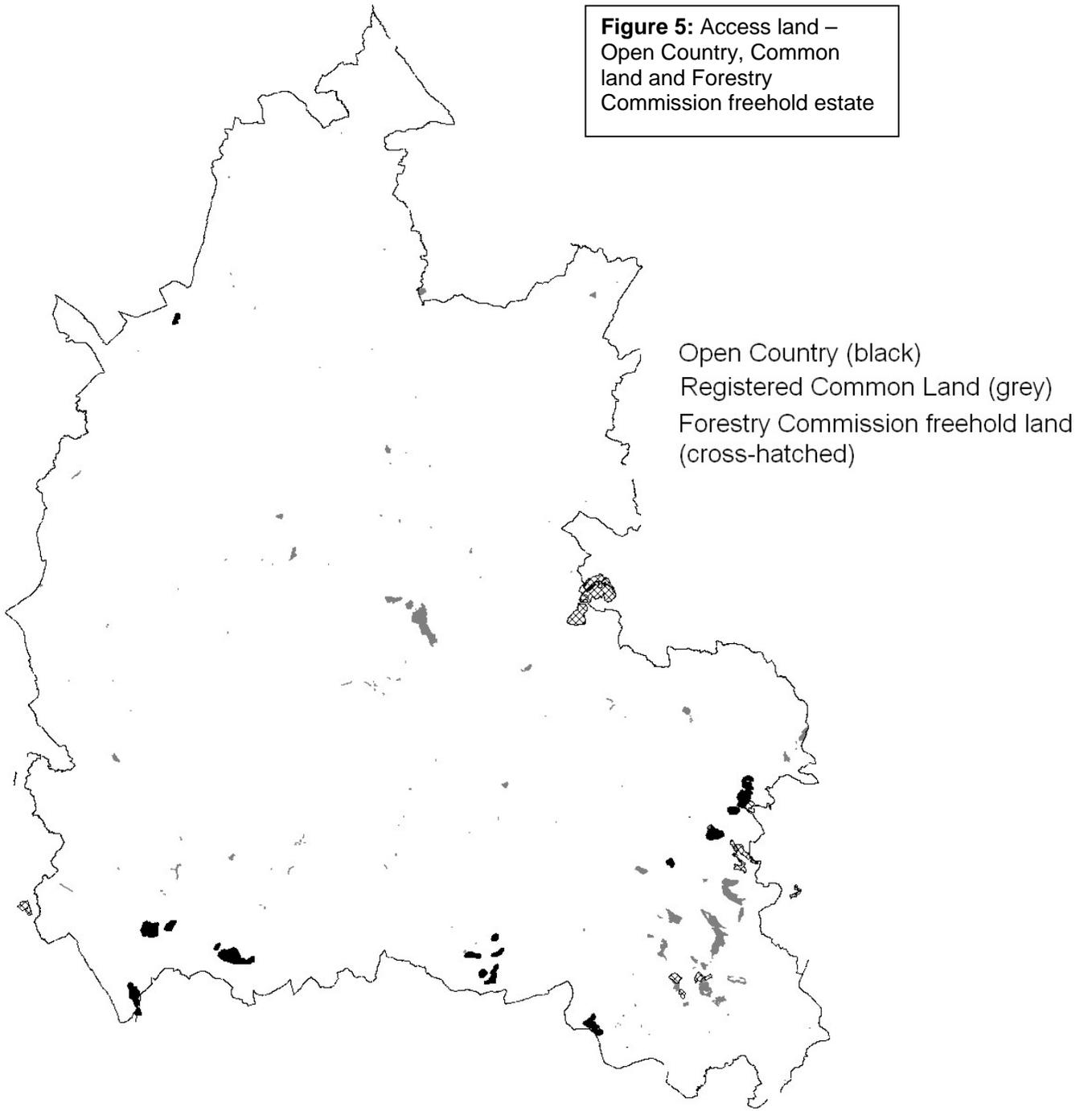
- 34 sites over 3ha
- 30 sites under 3ha

#### **Forestry Commission freehold estate** (voluntarily dedicated late 2005)

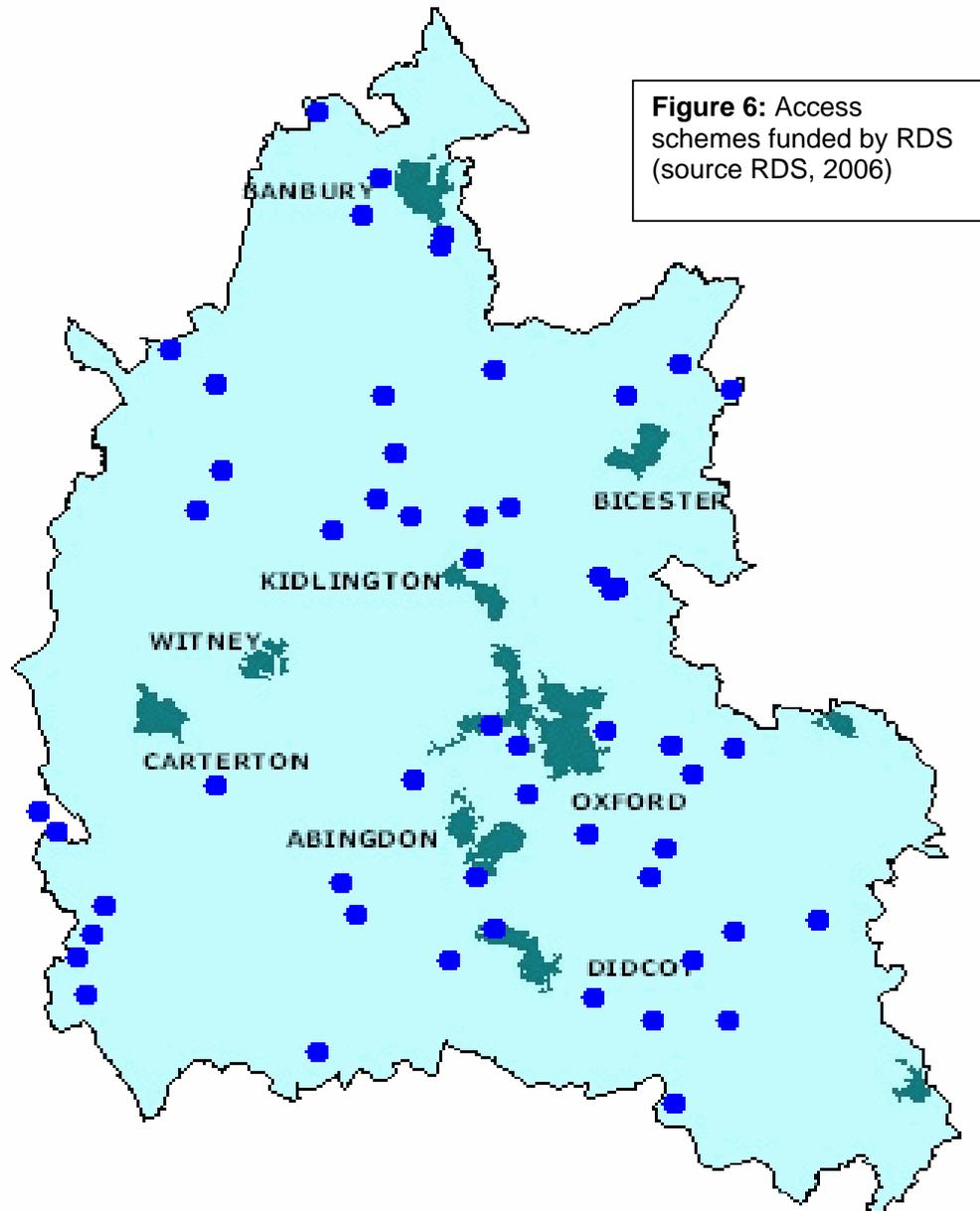
- 12 sites –634 ha in total

46. The County Council has assessed each area of land for the availability of access to it from other rights of way or public highways, and assess how this land can contribute to the wider countryside access resource. Works have been agreed with land managers in order to bid for funds from the Countryside Agency's Access Management Grant Scheme. This scheme provides three-quarters funding for measures to provide for easier access to the sites. Year one of the scheme will improve understanding and access to most areas of downland, and year two will improve access to registered common land

**Figure 5:** Access land –  
Open Country, Common  
land and Forestry  
Commission freehold estate



- 46.a **Formal permissive access** Routes created by permission with the agreement of the land manager are often created through agri-environmental schemes. As at January 2006 there are 47 such agreements in Oxfordshire, of which thirty nine are for walkers, seven are for horseriders and cyclists, and one is for wheelchair users, Figure 6 and Table 1.



**Table 1: Agri-environment scheme permissive access**

(source: <http://countrywalks.defra.gov.uk> website updated January 2006)

Type	District & Location					
	Cherwell	Ox. City	South	Vale	West	Total (miles)
<b>Disabled Access</b>				Abingdon 0.9		<b>0.9</b>
<b>Walkers</b>	Bicester 0.2 Fringford 0.2 Bodicote 0.3 Banbury 0.6 Charlton-on-Otmoor 0.2 Hornton 1.6 Hook Norton 0.7 Otmoor 0.4 Shipton on Cherwell 0.3 Banbury 0.4 Somerton 1.9 Tackley 0.8	North Hinksey 0.9 South Hinksey 2.8 Oxford 0.8	Wheatley 1.2 Wallingford 1.1 Wallingford 0.4 Thame 0.8 Wallingford 4 Horspath 0.4 Goring 0.1 Wallingford 0.7 Wheatley 2 Watlington 0.6	Abingdon 1.4 Shrivenham 1.3 Eaton 0.2 Wallingford 2.2	Witney 0.2 Faringdon 2.7 Bampton 0.3 Woodstock 0.4 Lechlade 0.9 Chipping Norton 0.2 Over Norton 0.4 Lechlade 1.1 Pudlicote 0.9 Chipping Norton 1.3	<b>39.9</b>
<b>Horses</b>	Broughton 0.8 Bicester 0.4		Wallingford 2.2	Cholsey 1.1 Steventon 1.2 Eaton, 0.2	Chipping Norton 1.3	<b>7.1</b>
<b>Open access</b>	Bicester 3 Bicester 32		Didcot 20 Didcot 0.5 Thame 2 Horspath 13 Goring 10	Abingdon 6 Abingdon 16 Wantage 95	Faringdon 19 Lechlade 14 Chadlington 3	<b>233 ha</b>

47. 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 new 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.
48. It is anticipated that following the review of these schemes and the creation of 'Natural England' it may be possible to target access improvements to where they are of greatest need, directly linked to the RoWIP. In addition access provision may be possible under other England Rural Development programme (ERDP) sources such as the Woodland Grant Scheme and Farm Woodland Premium Scheme.
49. ***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, not their actual condition). 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.

**A desk top analysis of this network is needed in order to ascertain the full extent of existing informal and formal access resources and their management, across the whole of the county. This analysis should use a Geographical Information System (GIS) in order that the picture of access can be seen and assessed using an electronic map.**

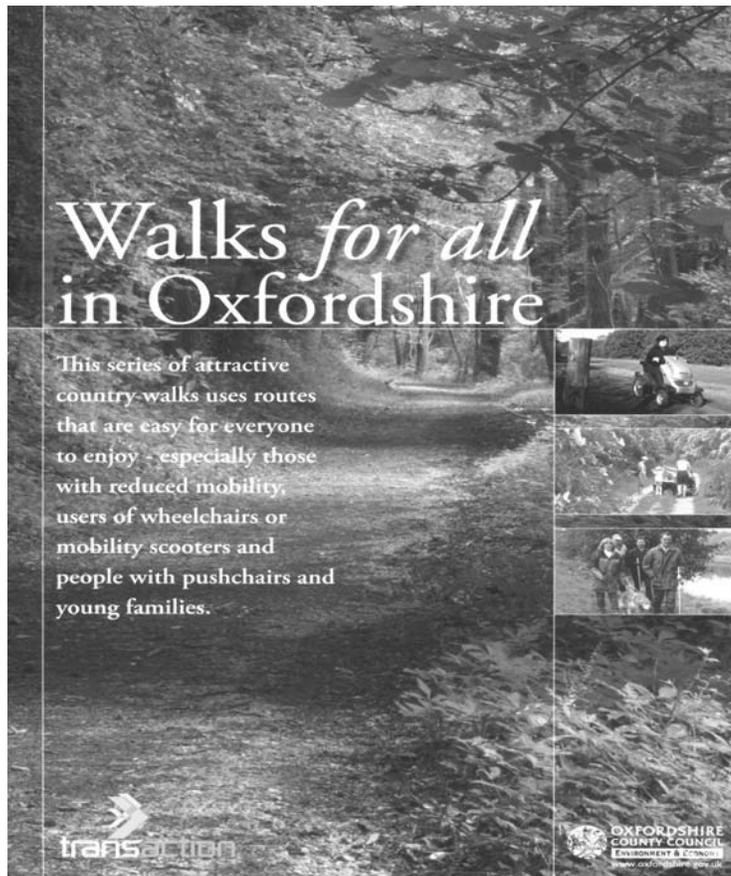
**AIM 1 to 4**

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

50. 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, Figure 7 - 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 it to as individuals and relevant outlets.
51. This is just the start. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) makes it unlawful to discriminate against anyone on the grounds of his or her disability in connection with employment, public transport, education and the provision of goods and services. There is currently debate as to whether for example, a farmer with rights of way across his land could be termed a 'service provider' for the purposes of the Act. The DDA was amended in 2005 and public bodies are required to positively promote disability equality and produce a Disability Equality Scheme by December 2006. This scheme will have to detail how a body will a) promote equality for disabled people, b) challenge discrimination against disabled people and c) help remove barriers for all disabled people. The DDA 2005 covers

all functions of public bodies, not just service, and therefore includes the provision of public rights of way (Countryside Agency, 2005).

52. The County Council will have to pay even more account of the needs of people with disabilities when undertaking its maintenance functions and when authorising path furniture (gates and stiles etc) and other works on footpaths and bridleways, but also when considering the creation of new routes and the diversion, extinguishment 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 hope to follow this framework, building up on 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.



**Figure 7:** Walks for All leaflet cover

**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

## 2.4 Users' needs and demands

53. In addition to assessing national, regional and local research, the Countryside Service has itself 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 late 2002 to over 900 participants, and six subsequent discussion groups
  - Developing the Improvement Plan 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
  - Making use of national, international and local needs based research
- 53.a Citizens Panel research from 2002, and subsequent officer-run focus groups (Box 4), established that nearly nine out of ten Oxfordshire residents made active use of their local countryside, with nearly three quarters walking or rambling, and over a third cycling for leisure. Less than ten percent combined, took part in horse riding or motorised vehicle use. We found that males were significantly more likely to access the countryside for sporting activities, whilst females were for likely to take part in family orientated activities. Young people (18-24) were found to be the most likely to say *"I do not make use of Oxfordshire's countryside"*.
- 53.b In terms of the type of countryside used, the most common, and most frequently used was open countryside (fields and meadows), followed by riverside paths and hills and downs. Country parks, canal-side paths and nature reserves all featured highly. The River Thames, followed by the White Horse, received the 'most popular' vote. Other 'good' things about Oxfordshire's countryside highlighted in the focus groups included – *"a diverse range of countryside"*, *"district councils produce free information"*, *"Health Walk schemes"*, *"large network of paths"*, *"access to observe nature"*, *"peace and tranquillity"*.
- 53.c Nearly a quarter of respondents cited litter as the worst aspect about Oxfordshire's countryside, followed by traffic volume and urbanisation. Dog fouling and vegetation growth were also poorly thought of. These negative factors are likely to reduce an individual's confidence and enjoyment of their local area. Other 'bad' things about Oxfordshire's countryside highlighted in the focus groups included *"car based society, less willing to walk to countryside"*, *"paths generally not accessible by wheelchair users"*, *"promotion of a route can ruin its intrinsic qualities"*, *"unequal standard of path from one landowner to another"*, *"poverty, age and social factors exclude use of countryside"*. Put

simply: 'Good' factors will attract and encourage use. 'Bad' factors will discourage use.

**Box 4: Important Issues identified through the Citizens panel (with over 630 respondees) and the six subsequent OCC focus groups (Oct 02-Feb 03)**

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-sanitising 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 respondees said that they lacked confidence and knowledge regarding their rights and responsibilities when out in the countryside.

AIM 1-4

## 2.5 How the network meets the needs of users

54. 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 signed according to the ease of following the route; enough information about a route on and off site in order to assess its suitability for their intended use; secure car parking or preferably easy access from settlements or public transport; opportunities for refreshments and toilet facilities; safe and convenient crossings of 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 vertical and horizontal 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.

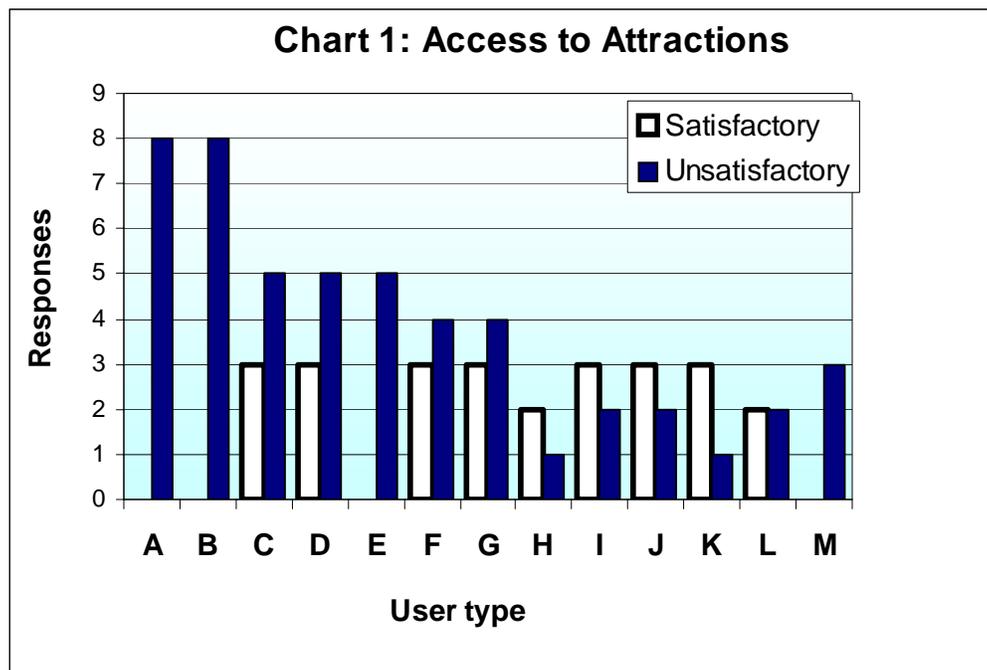
AIM 1-4

55. **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 (see below for categorisation). 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 for the discussion and analysis of each subject area.

Code	User Type
A	<b>Walkers</b> with mobility Impairments (but not wheelchair users)
B	<b>Walkers</b> with visual impairments
C	<b>Walkers</b> in family groups
D	<b>Walkers</b> with no impairments
E	<b>Cyclists</b> with mobility/visual impairments
F	<b>Cyclists</b> in family groups
G	<b>Cyclists</b> with no impairments
H	<b>Horse Riders</b> with mobility impairments
I	<b>Horse Riders</b> in family group
J	<b>Horse Riders</b> with no impairment
K	<b>Horse Drivers</b>
L	<b>Motorised Vehicles</b>
M	<b>Wheelchair Users</b> specified in respondents' comments

### 2.5.1 Access to attractions, chart 1

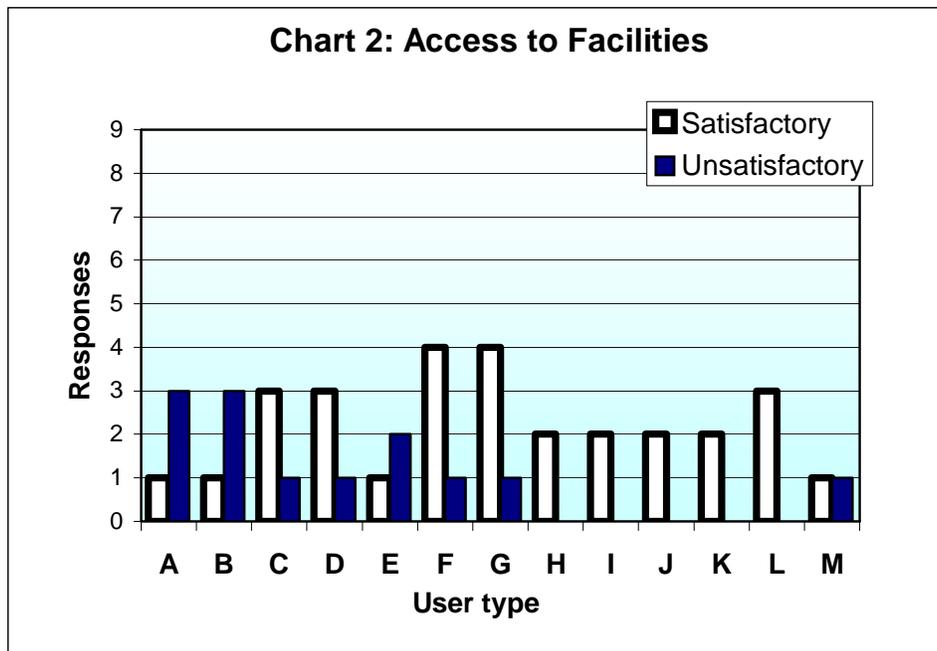
55.a. With regard to access to attractions, such as country sites, view points, river locks and rural experiences there was an overall score of **dissatisfaction**. Generally it was felt that this was a physical provision issue rather than an information issue. This is understandable given the real lack of accessible routes to attractions.



- 55.b Qualitative comments gave weight to specific factors. The Chilterns AONB felt that there were many access opportunities, but that these were often similar, with a basic car park and little information, popular with locals or confident countryside users but not easy to use for others. The officer from West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) felt that access for people with disabilities could be reduced when current legislation to reclassify some paths with vehicular access (s47 CROW Act 2000) comes into force, and also that both physical and information provision for legal off road cycling or access from urban centres to the countryside was poor. South Oxfordshire British Horse Society (BHS) felt that *“they had lots of lovely viewpoints and rural experiences but for young riders and novice riders and horses the major A roads and B roads are extremely fast and dangerous for the family groups and for the safety of all individuals. No real verges to provide safety either. The bridleways themselves are good but it can take up to 20 minutes to access them”*. The national trails manager commented that the priority was to *“make improvements to short and medium length routes passing attractions, nature reserves, historic sites and great landscapes (e.g. national trails)”*.
- 55.c The Ramblers’ and the Second Lease group provided specific suggestions for access to attractions, Box 4, page 10. Other local authorities acknowledge this lack of provision through their community planning and development planning process. Cherwell District Council are hoping to use foot/cycleways to link open spaces in Bicester whilst Oxford City Council’s Local Plan details a number of specific links for new access routes. CPRE cautioned against limitless expansion of tourism in the countryside as they felt *“it is important that the tranquillity and character of the countryside which people seek for quiet recreation is not damaged by such development”*.

**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

2.5.2 Access to facilities, chart 2



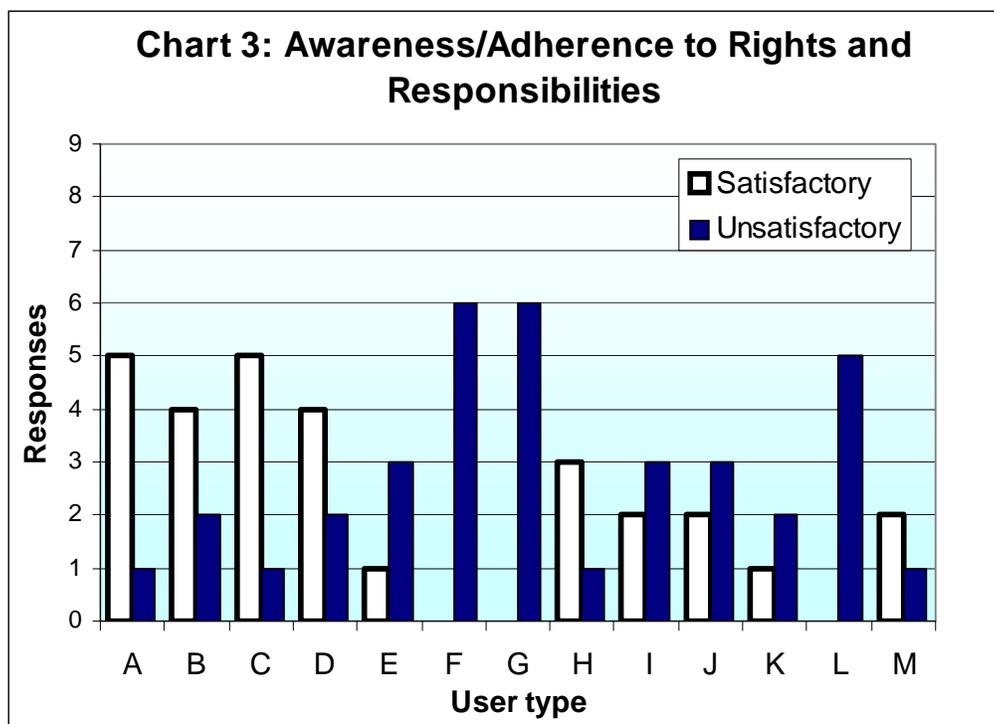
55.d Responses regarding access to facilities such as parking, shops, schools, village halls, pubs and toilets, gave an overall score of **satisfaction**, although there were less responses to this question. Responses concerning equestrians were all positive but walkers and cyclists with visual and mobility impairments had more negative comments.

55.e The national trails manager felt that local authority or nationally promoted routes plus those routes prioritised for improvement because of their attributes, should have access to facilities (car parking, pubs, tea shops) in order to promote and encourage expenditure amongst Oxfordshire’s businesses. Even where such facilities exist, there are problems too. West Oxfordshire felt that groups of cyclists often experienced problems due to the lack of mass cycle parking at facilities. The Environment Agency considered most of their locks to be an attraction in their own right, and most were also located close to facilities. These could form additional promoted routes or complement existing provision.

**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

2.5.3 Awareness/adherence to rights and responsibilities, chart 3



55.f Responses regarding user types’ awareness and compliance with rights and responsibilities were mainly either **strongly satisfactory** (walkers) or **strongly unsatisfactory** (cyclists and motorised vehicle users). Particular problems cited

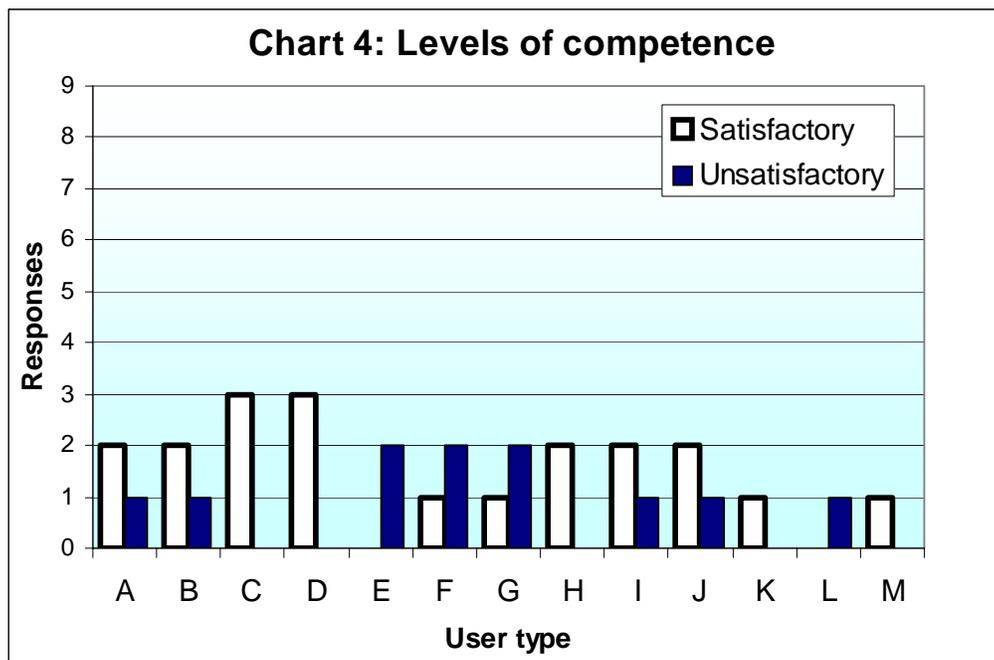
were “*cycling on towpaths*” and also “*not understanding their responsibilities and the impact they have on other users*”. Both cyclists and horse riders were thought to stray onto footpaths, and horses were thought likely to stray off the path onto the neighbouring land.

- 55.g However problems are not confined to these user groups. Chilterns AONB commented that, “*Problems such as dog fouling, litter, vandalism and footpath damage increase as well as problems such as dogs, livestock and people using land they do not have access to*”. The Cycle Tourist Club (CTC) also felt that awareness and adherence to rights and responsibilities varies widely, and were not sure if this was caused by a lack of knowledge, or people ignoring the ‘rules’.

**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

2.5.4 Levels of competence, chart 4

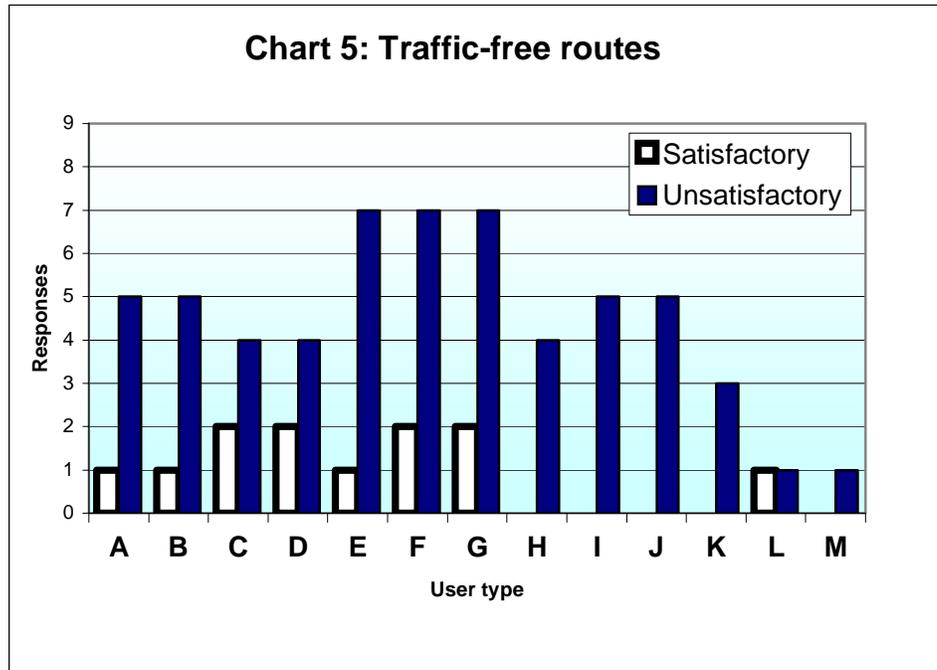


- 55.h There was a very low response to this part of the questionnaire, but again more negative comments about cyclists’ abilities. Even the cycling group, CTC felt that “*some off-roaders have grown up feeling that they can ride anywhere. They give the rest a bad name*” (CTC). The equestrian response once again highlighted the fast roads around Oxfordshire, which they felt “*were a significant problem for novice or young riders*”. It is assumed that the same comment could be applied to young or inexperienced cyclists, the main difference being that cyclists are not mounted on a live and sometimes unpredictable animal. West Oxfordshire DC felt that any increase in education or information would be positive and that educational or other partnerships should be encouraged.

**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

2.5.5 Traffic free routes, chart 5



- 55.i Unsurprisingly, a high level of **dissatisfaction** was recorded for this aspect of countryside access, with negative scores for all user types. Equestrian users were felt to have the most unsatisfactory network with many respondents feeling that the bridleway network is particularly fragmented. Principal causes are sections cut off by roads and the need to travel along busy roads to link from one off-road route to another. The South Oxfordshire BHS response stated that *“possible road usage in this area is approx. 75%. None of the bridleway networks link up without a major road in the way”*.
- 55.j Buckinghamshire County Council felt that *“creating better linkages in their bridleway network would be one of our more important strategic aims”*. Cherwell District Council suggested that the use of short strategic creations would be useful for all users, and gave the example of the Jubilee Ride, north of Bicester which makes use of agri-environment scheme permissive routes, as well as farm tracks and ‘farm parking’.
- 55.k Families with young children often want to spend part of a day cycling together on traffic free and reasonably well surfaced routes with secure facilities each end or along the route. There is only really one such route in Oxfordshire – The Phoenix Trail, which runs along a disused railway line from Thame to Princes Risborough. Other tracks are not managed as standalone ‘community paths’, but instead provide either commuter links (there are approx 75km tracks alongside roads in rural Oxfordshire), or links as part of the National Cycle Network

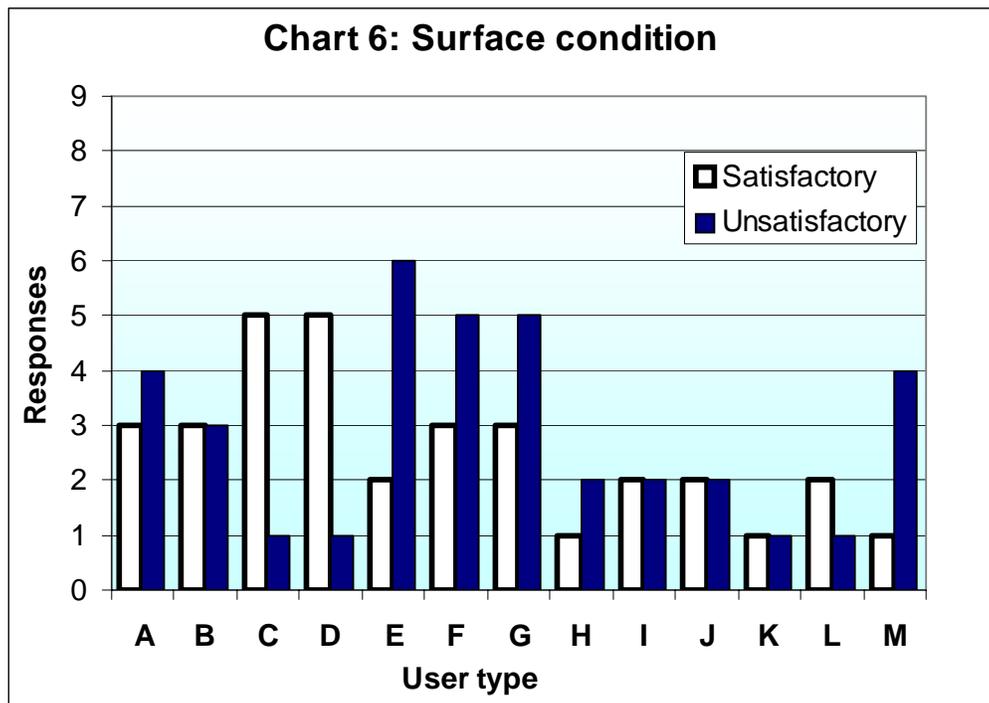
(approximately 41km of cycletracks away from roads). In addition, the national trails manager said that “*although unsurfaced, the Ridgeway west of the Thames offers the potential to be one of the longest and finest off-road recreational opportunities for cyclists and equestrians in the country*”.

- 55.l As well as the need for more traffic free routes, Chilterns AONB felt that we should be tackling rural transport at its source as “*people driving to countryside for days out generate traffic. Need promoted walks from stations*” . They felt that as urban area populations expand, there is more and more traffic pressure on country roads and a consequent increased demand for traffic-free routes. The Chilterns AONB actively target their advertising and leaflet distribution to mainline railway stations in London for just this reason, and they also encourage stations and railway operators to be supportive of carrying bicycles.

**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

2.5.6 Surface condition, chart 6



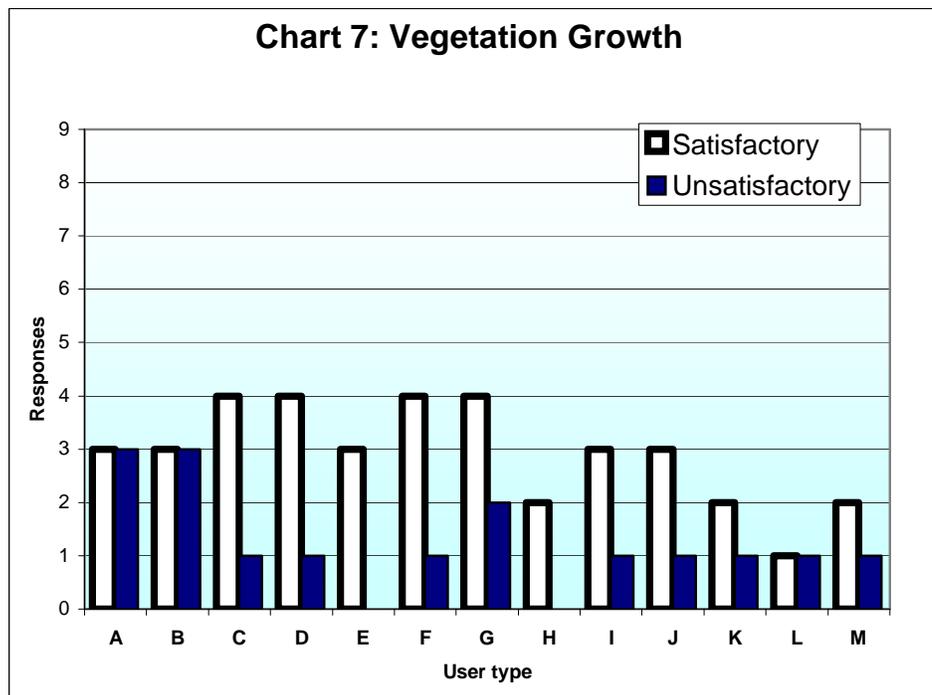
- 55.m There was no significant pattern of distribution between satisfactory and dissatisfactory surfaces for this aspect of countryside access. The principal user types with **unsatisfactory** provision are for users with mobility difficulties and for cyclists, many of whom would need or prefer hard surfaced routes (but not necessarily sealed). High scores for **satisfactory** were recorded for walkers in family groups and those with no impairments.

- 55.n It is difficult to generalise across the county, especially as the underlying soil type and topography can play such a huge role in a area or route's 'resilience'. Even opinion between users of the same type can differ because there are so many different needs and opinions of what is satisfactory and reasonable. Improvements themselves can often cause conflicts - WODC pointed out that *'the resurfacing of paths with loose aggregates makes the path difficult and even painful for horses'*, and the Wildlife Trust said that authorities *"need to preserve the full range of countryside experience, but improve conditions at certain key facilities/sites"*
- 55.o However there is often conflict between different types of users because of the impact each has on the surface condition. The Chilterns AONB felt that many walkers and cyclists were put off using paths that were shared with horses because of the extent of hoof damage, and Oxford City Council reported that the towpath was made particularly hard to use because of bicycle and vehicle damage (particularly in between Folly Bridge and Iffley Lock), although British Waterways highlighted a recent survey which ascertained that 70% of users were satisfied with the surface of towpaths. All user groups have highlighted the condition of the Ridgeway as a problem. CTC even felt the current Ridgeway issue is an example of why England's path network is not big enough for 4x4 use, and why 4x4 use should be curbed before it becomes an *"unstoppable menace"*. They suggested that changes in the planning system could enable land managers to offer 'off-path' facilities for this sort of challenge so that it does not affect public paths.
- 55.p Some criticism was levelled at the current maintenance of paths, for example WODC felt that *"motorised users often suffer most from poor surface conditions. They receive criticism for damaging lanes (which may be blamed on a minority of users) but the rights of way are rarely improved or upgraded"*. The officer suggested that 'greenlaning' clubs could perhaps contribute to maintenance as condition of use.

**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

### 2.5.7 Vegetation growth, chart 7



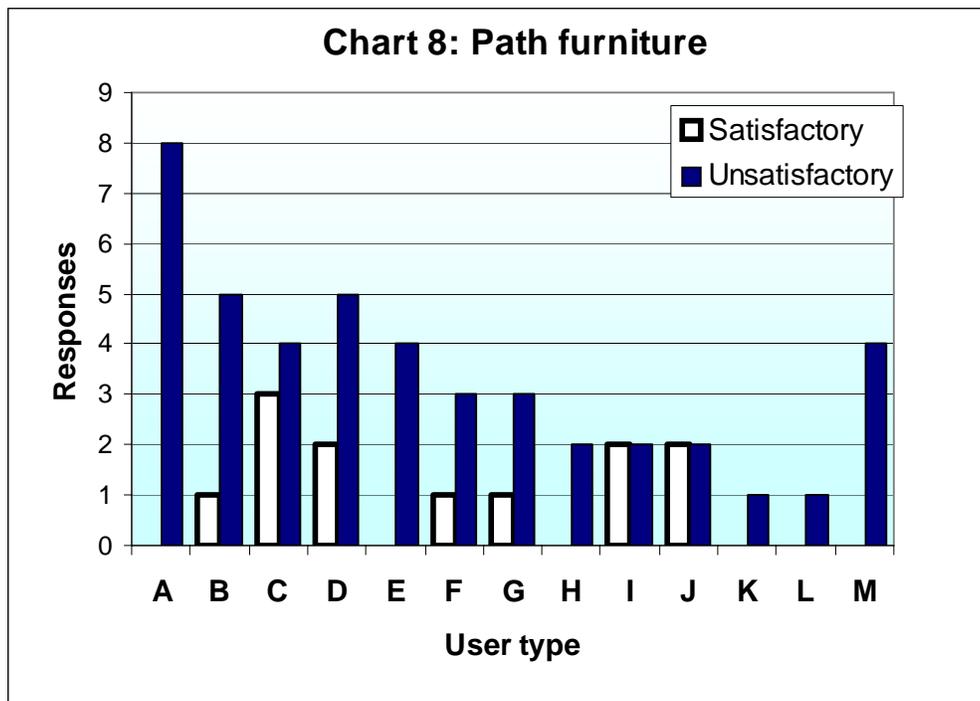
- 55.q Overall, this appeared to be more or equally **satisfactory** for all user types, although for walkers with vision and mobility impairments there were higher unsatisfactory scores. Evidence from the reporting database and from observation would counter this assessment, and it is very clear from Citizens Panel research, focus groups, current reporting and observation, that despite best efforts and available resources, Oxfordshire’s paths are **not** adequately cleared.
- 55.r South Oxfordshire BHS said “OCC are fantastic with clearing the fallen trees on the bridleways, but the general vegetation growth is quite difficult for the riders with large horses, as we have a network of bridleways in woods which are sometimes difficult to access. Average horse to shoulder is 5ft, then add rider's upper body”. Allowing for horseriders’ extra headroom to ten feet is something that WODC also identified, and suggested that this can be easily overlooked when undertaking works at ground level. British Waterways highlighted hidden holes as being one of the potential hazards that can be caused by overlong vegetation, and this vegetation also restricted the width of the path and users’ confidence or perception of security. CTC felt that vegetation varies according to the season but that the wider countryside ‘should not be turned into suburbia’. Others have pointed out that many paths offer secure and valuable habitats and linking corridors for wildlife and that many environmental benefits can be gained from sensitive timing and extent of vegetation cutting and the disposal of cuttings. A rambler from Hook Norton offered his suggestion that ‘*general maintenance should be end-to-end. For example, from parish Y centre to parish X centre - and recurring problems such as overgrowing hawthorn/blackthorn need annual attention*’. He also suggested a role for volunteers in this work.
- 55.s As a major part of its operation, the countryside service undertakes seasonal and cyclical maintenance of herbaceous and woody vegetation in an efficient and cost effective manner using the service’s tasks team, contractors, the

Cotswold AONB and the Chilterns Society volunteers. This vegetation clearance is both planned and reactive and is intended to reduce the need to report problems.

**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

### 2.5.8 Path furniture, chart 8



55.t Responses regarding the adequacy of path furniture such as stiles, gates and bridges were predominantly **unsatisfactory** for all user types. Opinions were divided between making access easier to reflect the changing nature of agriculture (less livestock) and also reflecting the increasing range of needs of users and non-users of the countryside.

55.u The 'Second Lease' over 50s group's top priority was the removal of dilapidated stiles and gates across the county, and also improving the design of stiles that were still necessary for livestock control. The Chilterns AONB comments supported this view and felt that an aging population "*would increase demand for paths with no stiles or kissing gates.*" They also felt "*that there was less need for them with decline in livestock farming.*" However it should be borne in mind that livestock farmers help maintain much of the diversity, beauty and interest in the cultural landscape. There is a need to control livestock, but there is also a responsibility to make access as easy as possible, and any furniture should be kept simple, safe and convenient to use. Indeed, the Country Land and Business Association (CLA) pointed out that "*gates and stiles are necessary for management of land. Local Authorities need to be reminded that these*

*structures are property of the occupier and cannot be altered or removed without agreement.... LA's should consider needs of disabled and less mobile but should consider how improvements involving gates and stiles impact on land management”.*

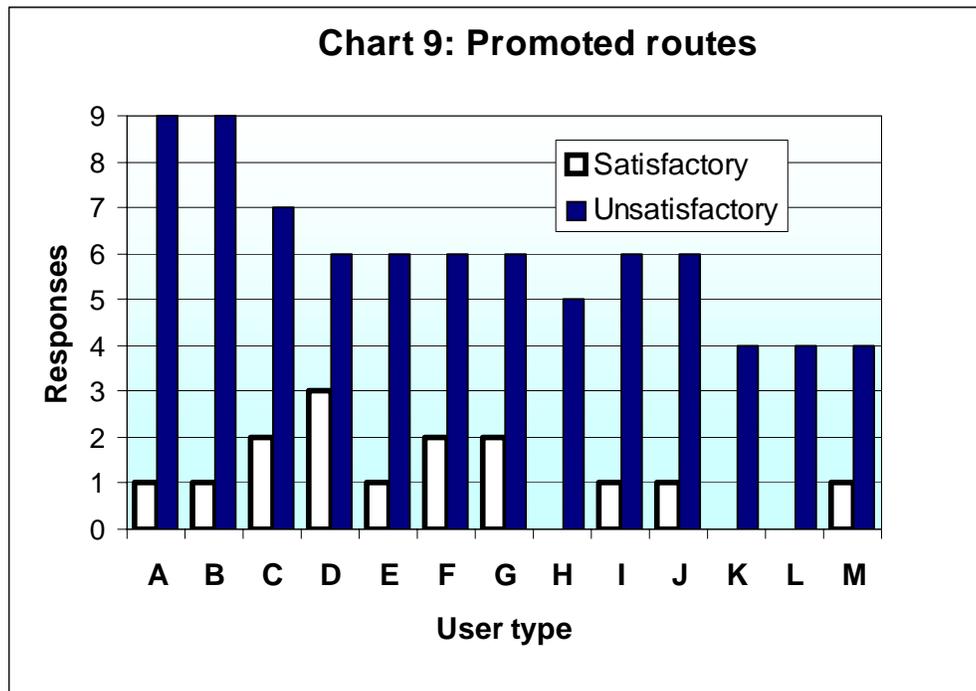
- 55.v It should be borne in mind that stiles and most kissing gates create absolute barriers for users in wheelchairs and those with children in pushchairs. Many of these people have the equipment, enthusiasm and commitment to be able to tackle terrain that most able-bodied people would think is a barrier to them. They may overcome these terrain issues of steep slopes, ploughed fields or boggy sections by their own fitness, using helpers, or using technology such as electric off-road wheelchairs. OCC and its partners have a moral responsibility to raise the profile and increase the priority of this sort of accessibility work. Encouraging and supporting land managers to install gaps and gates is the only realistic way of reducing this form of exclusion in the countryside.
- 55.w The RA referred to OCC’s own statistics in that *“less than two thirds of network is 'easy-to-use”*. They felt that *“too many paths obstructed, many bridges missing or in need of repair* (see section 4.1). Whilst British Waterways reflected on their own paths accessibility for all *“chicanes (staggered barriers) at access points to the canal are often too narrow for mobility buggies - e.g. Aristotle Lane recreation ground and Hythe Bridge terminus of Oxford Canal”*.
- 55.x Cherwell District Council suggested that *“as bridleways have no stiles, they offer the potential for more accessible routes for walkers with mobility problems, subject to there being a suitable surface condition”*. The National Trails comment summarised the general feelings about adequacy of the path furniture - *“still too many awful stiles, too many gates really difficult to open, too few waymarks”*. Sustrans stated that *‘there is nothing more frustrating for the non-motorised user than having to stop to open gates when there is no obvious reason for them to be closed’* and suggested a new standard that required land managers to keep gates locked open unless needed for stock control or to prevent vehicular access.

**KEY ISSUE 14: Path furniture (stiles, gates, bridges) should pose the minimum restriction as is 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

#### 2.4.9 Promoted routes, chart 9

- 55.y This section attracted the largest number of responses, which were overwhelmingly **unsatisfactory** for all user types. Responses were concerned with the physical provision of routes, the quality of the information and awareness, and the potential of such provision for economic generation.



55.z Chilterns AONB felt that information provision in most areas was uncoordinated and unguided. Based on their experiences of coordinating this work across four highway authorities, they suggested that OCC “*need to assess whether promoted walks meet the newer countryside agendas of quality, easy access, easy to reach without car, encourage spend in local economy*” and that an authority should “*withdraw or alter those routes which do not*”. If a promoted route does meet these needs then Cherwell District Council suggested that the routes “*should be assessed to see whether physical changes are needed, in order to make the routes as accessible as possible*”. Chilterns AONB also felt that there was “*a lack of coordinated promotion of promoted routes, e.g. OCC website only shows own promoted routes, they should have a central website and phone centre for all, promote at local level by leaflets or posters in doctor’s surgeries, railway and bus stations, sports centres, campsites and pubs*”.

55.aa The need to link this countywide coordination to state of the paths on the ground was also made apparent. OCC were criticised by both groups of the RA for “*forgetting [the maintenance of] circular walks it once publicised*.” They went on to say “*It is time to complete the process for those settlements still needing them. In some places a lot of path creation will be needed, e.g. around Bicester, in other areas, relatively few (e.g. around Chipping Norton)*”. The RA also felt that few people seem aware of OS Explorer Maps and even less were aware of the Definitive Map.

55.bb With regard to specific equestrian issues, South Oxfordshire BHS explained that “*we have to box our horses to take advantage of actual linked networks that the landowners have given permission and allow road- free routes*” . WODC pointed out that equestrian users and businesses have needs too. “*We would like to promote equestrian tourism within the district which requires more information [but] few horse groups want to work with their local authorities*”.

55.cc Cherwell District Council emphasised that its Community Plan refers to grant assistance for local councils seeking to improve awareness and access to their local countryside, and that this may include circular routes and access for people with mobility problems. Oxford City has also recognised the need for specific additional links and circular routes, and these are detailed in their Local Plan.

55.dd Finally, National Trails made a comprehensive response based on a marketing (user led) approach. For people with vision or mobility impairments, they felt that OCC “*Need to provide detailed information so that [these people] can make their own informed decision about whether to visit*”. They went on to suggest a means of prioritising promoted routes:

- **Local opportunities** for short walks/rides from each small settlement, “*and many more from larger ones (this should be the focus for improvements to access for less mobile people)*”
- **Routes connecting to public transport**, especially railways, but include bus services where railways do not exist.
- **Routes (short and medium) passing attractions**, nature reserves, historic sites, great landscapes (e.g. national trails)
- **Routes for day walks/rides** for weekend or longer trips to local promote expenditure

**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 that people can use, thereby contributing directly to the local economy.**

AIM 1-4

## Section 3: The extent to which the rights of way network is managed to meet the needs of users

### 3.1 Network availability

56. 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.
57. The Countryside Service has developed a comprehensive database of rights of way management information. This database allows the following information (Table 1) regarding the state of the path network to be detailed with a high degree of confidence.

**Table 1: OCC RoW network availability data, 2006 (Source OCC 'Milestones report', January 2006, based continuously updated information since 1994 census, and report to OCC Monitoring Group October 2005)**

<b><i>Paths open</i></b>	94.3% of path links* were found to be free of major obstructions  <i>*a path link is a section of a path between a road or a junction with another right of way. There may be more than one link to a particular right of way. OCC uses path 'sequences' (field boundaries) for its database and path management</i>
<b><i>Paths easy to use</i></b>	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>
Signing	89% of 5073 roadside locations were signed
Waymarking	33% of 'easy to use' links would benefit from waymarking 40.6% of 'not easy to use' links would benefit from waymarking
Stiles	85% of 4834 stiles were in useable condition, 14% unsatisfactory, 1% dangerous
Gates	88% of 5784 gates were in useable condition, 12% unsatisfactory
Bridges	93% of 2050 bridges in place and in useable condition, 7% unsatisfactory, 5% missing, 1% dangerous
Surfacing	408 instances of unsatisfactory surfaces, 8 dangerous, 239 surfaces causing obstruction to passage

Caseload list at October 2005. (single problems)	1973 need inspecting, 95 require site visit 411 require task jobsheet, 830 monitoring change 943 requiring contact, 489 awaiting completion 354 awaiting reply, <b>= 5141 Net outstanding recorded caseload</b>			
Cases 'resolved' (per 6 month period)	1559 (Mar 04-Sep05) 1172 (Sep 04 –Mar05) 1507 (Mar 04-Sep04) 1224 (Sep03-Mar04) 1142 (Mar03-Sep03) 1205 (Sep02-Mar03) 1145 (Mar02-Sep02) 1308 (Sep01-Mar02) 1407 (Mar 01-Sep01)			
Access Improvements Between 2001 & 2005	stiles <i>decreased</i> from 4999 to 4834 gates <i>increased</i> from 5117 to 5784 bridges <i>increased</i> from 1924 to 2050			
Top four obstructions (physical features) across the network				
	<b>1 (top)</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Footpaths</b>	Fences	Barbed wire	Hedges	Gates/gateways
<b>Bridleways</b>	Fences	Gates/gateways	Barbed wire	Hedges
<b>NB it should be borne in mind that summer vegetation growth and disturbance of the highway by agricultural operations can be a common causes of dissatisfaction on the network</b>				
<p><b>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.</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">AIM 1 &amp; 3</p>				

### 3.2 Network accessibility

58. 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). Section 2 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.

59. **Information provision** Locals 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 paths. The countryside is made up of a cultural landscape of living and working people and potentially hazardous property which needs to be treated with due respect. Information is essential for land managers too. As a way of addressing this need, the Countryside Service produces a free information booklet titled “*Exploring Oxfordshire*” which summarises this information and gives pointers for finding out more. One of these pointers is to the Service’s web pages [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/countryside](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/countryside), which are kept up to date with information and recreational options. Guidance on ploughing and cropping as well as stiles and gates has also been produced for land managers. This is available as a printed leaflet and also on the website.
60. **Promoted route guides** The service has also produced printed recreational route information for walkers, cyclists and horse riders in order to encourage sustainable access to the countryside, either by encouraging the use of public transport, targeting specific groups or by contributing to the local economy through highlighting accommodation or refreshment services. These range from the Oxfordshire Way, a 68 mile linear route, to a range of eight circular routes from 3 to 8 miles in length. These are sold directly from the Service and also through tourist and visitor information centres, libraries, bookshops and other retailers such as caravan sites and visitor attractions. 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.***
61. **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 too, 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, because of 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 available on our website and also distribute it to as individuals and relevant outlets as possible.

- 61.a **Accessing information** Current information about where to go, what to see, and how to behave is delivered through leaflets, books or websites that people choose to pick up or access via the internet and 'download'. Results from the Citizens Panel research in 2002/3 indicated that overwhelmingly, residents favour tourist information centres to get information about accessing Oxfordshire's countryside, followed by library, internet or bookshops. This reinforces the importance of making information available in the main information centres for residents and visitors, as well as electronically. User organisations, county and district councils had very low scores as places to look for information. Scores for these matched those for residents who would not look or would not know where to look for information.
- 61.b None of the detailed information found in leaflets, websites and books is 'on the gatepost' - at the start of a path when people go out to enjoy the countryside. Nor is it available to people who either will not or cannot pickup, download or read this information. Out on the paths themselves, the Service currently attempts to encourage understanding and ease of use by using signposts and waymarker discs that indicate the status of the path (whether footpath, bridleway or other right of way), plus destination/distance where possible. The discs also have the Service's web address and telephone number. OCC promoted routes also display '*circular route*' on the sign. In addition small discs can be attached that give instructions such as '*please keep your dog under control*', '*please keep to the path*', and '*no cycling*'. These could be expanded in order to communicate the new Country Code themes of "*Respect, Protect, Enjoy*" but this may have to be balanced against excessive visual intrusions in rural areas. To complement this 'on the gatepost' information approach, much more use could be made of local council noticeboards and websites to display maps and information pamphlets, perhaps encouraging local residents' ownership of their paths through leaflet and map production, especially for local history and points of interest, signing, and even guided walks and events.
- 61.c Focus groups that followed the Citizens Panel illustrated a widespread lack of awareness of countryside access rights. Many participants did not know which type of users were entitled to use paths with different coloured waymarks, and what the standard colours meant, despite having '*footpath*', '*bridleway*' or '*byway*' written on them. Some others did not even realise that the web address and telephone number on the waymarks could be used to find out more, or to report problems. Overall, it was felt that people did not understand their rights and responsibilities when in the countryside, and that this especially applied with children. One participant particularly felt that the national curriculum should have countryside access issues built in to it

**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

### **3.3 How the network is managed**

62. 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.
63. The Service’s countryside access responsibilities are delivered by a section of 19 people based in three teams across two offices at central Oxford and at Holton. The definitive map team who deal with legal changes to the Definitive Map and Statement (DMS); the field team who deal with enforcement, maintenance and improvement issues; and the access and information team who deal with the RoWIP process, OCAF, information and marketing, and from 2005, the management of new CROW Act access areas.
64. For 2005/6 the approximate gross budget for the countryside access part of the service (Definitive Map, RoW maintenance, Access & Information) was £925,000, of which £504,000 was spent on staff and £421,000 on materials, contracts, equipment and overheads.

#### *3.3.1 Definitive Map team*

65. This team manage the Definitive Map and Statement. 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. The Government has recently imposed a cut-off date of 2026 for claims for changes to the DMS based on historical evidence, although claims based on user evidence will continue to be able to be made after this date. There is also a proposal to restrict Byway claims. As at January 2006, there are 83 applications pending at various stages of the DMMO process. Current demand for DMMOs is already greater than the team’s existing capacity. However an additional significant increase in pressure on resources is anticipated due to the ‘cut-off’ date and the re-classification of RUPPs to Restricted Byways.

66. 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 January 2006, there were 47 cases pending at various stages of the PPO process. We aim to deal with 12 PPO applications per year and these applications are also likely to be submitted over capacity, especially with the impending new right for landowners to apply for path diversions, and the new criteria for 'special diversions' in schools or designated crime 'blackspots'.
67. 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. The RoWIP process is likely to include substantial new links and upgrades, which although needed and desirable, will undoubtedly create an additional strain on resources if the suggestions in section 2 are an indication of demand. All of these aspects create a significant and increasing 'capacity' resourcing pressure, which realistically can only be addressed by the appointment of a number of additional staff.

### *3.3.2 Field team*

68. 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 actual main land use. Therefore although the highway is legally vested with the highway authority (controlling as much as the land as is necessary to ensure the rights 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 these 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 undertake the majority of the 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 unmanageable and unsustainable when it comes to delivery of the Service's existing responsibilities not to mention proactive ambitions for making the countryside more accessible to all. Ideally the team will need additional investment for additional area officers plus additions to the task team so that local and strategic improvements, already identified by our research, can be made.

### *3.3.3 Access & Information team*

69. Production and management of the RoWIP process (then securing funding for improvements post-publication), and undertaking our responsibilities on new areas of access land, are the main roles of this team, together with strategic planning for countryside access around the county, and the management and development of the Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum (a Local Access Forum). Section 3.2 outlines some the other printed and web-based information aspects of this team's work. There is a high and increasing demand for electronic information, whether downloadable route leaflets or information on rights and responsibilities. The public, as well as partner and interest organisations, want readily available and accurate information and resources, which means continual appraisal, modification and development of

our service. From 2005 additional responsibilities have included planning and implementing our role in the new areas of access land, working closely with land managers and user groups in order that this land can be accessed responsibly. As with the other two teams, resources will need to be increased.

**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, RoWIP dedications, investigations, order procedures and decision making.

***Field 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.

***Access and Information team***

- New demand for access land/RoWIP liaison, assessment and then delivery/management of programmes. Ideally need additional staff and budgets for RoWIP and Access Land responsibilities

AIM 1 – 4

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## Glossary of terms

<b>Access Land, Open Access Land,</b>	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”.
<b>AONB</b>	<b>Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty</b> Oxfordshire has three - Chilterns, Cotswolds and North Wessex Downs, each with their own management team and management plan.
<b>BHS</b>	<b>British Horse Society</b>
<b>BOAT, Byway</b>	<b>Byway Open to All Traffic</b> 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
<b>Bridleway</b>	<b>Public Bridleway</b> 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.
<b>BS5709:2001</b>	<b>British Standard</b> Covers the specification for gaps, gates and stiles.
<b>BVPI 178</b>	<b>Best Value Performance Indicator</b> 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.
<b>Citizens Panel</b>	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 Citizens Panel survey (of 1000 residents).
<b>CLA</b>	<b>Country Land and Business Association</b>
<b>CoAg</b>	<b>Countryside Agency</b> Government agency that leads on countryside access. The Land, Access and Recreation part of CoAg combines with English Nature and the RDS to form “Natural England” from October 2006.
<b>Countryside Service</b>	The part of Oxfordshire County Council who’s work includes protecting, maintaining, improving and promoting public rights of way and other countryside access resources.
<b>CRoW Act</b>	<b>Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000</b> – 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.
<b>Cycle Track</b>	A way over which there is a right to cycle, and possibly also to walk.
<b>CTC</b>	<b>Cyclists’ Touring Club</b>
<b>DDA</b>	<b>Disability Discrimination Act (1995 and 2005)</b>
<b>de facto access</b>	Access which is available on the ground, even though it may not be officially recorded.
<b>DMS</b>	<b>Definitive Map and Statement</b> 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.
<b>DMMO</b>	<b>Definitive Map Modification Order</b> Legal order which changes the Definitive Map and Statement.
<b>Defra</b>	<b>Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs</b> Government department whose responsibilities include rights of way.
<b>de jure access</b>	Access rights which are recorded legally (“based on law”).
<b>Department for Transport</b>	Government department responsible for highways other than rights of way.

Glossary of terms

<b>Discovering Lost Ways Project</b>	Project set up by the Countryside Agency to research historic rights of way before the Definitive Map closes to historic claims in 2026.
<b>Oxfordshire Highways</b>	The part of Oxfordshire County Council which maintains the main highway network, unclassified roads, cycletracks and asphalted footpaths.
<b>Diversion</b>	The changing of the route of a right of way on the ground using a legal order.
<b>ERDP</b>	<b>England Rural Development Programme</b> 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.
<b>English Heritage</b>	Government agency responsible for the historic built environment and archaeology.
<b>Fieldfare Trust</b>	A charity which works with people with disabilities and countryside managers to improve access to the countryside for all.
<b>Environment Agency</b>	Government agency responsible for river management, waste management, pollution control and other environmental matters.
<b>Environmental Stewardship</b>	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.
<b>Finger post</b>	A signpost placed where a public right of way leaves a metalled road. Shows the status, direction, and where appropriate the destination and distance.
<b>Forestry Commission</b>	The Government body responsible for managing the state's forests as well as supporting the management of privately owned woodland.
<b>Footpath</b>	<b>Public Footpath</b> A highway over which the right of way is on foot only. Waymarked by yellow arrows.
<b>Footway</b>	A way set aside for pedestrians at the edge of a carriageway (a pavement).
<b>GIS</b>	<b>Geographic Information System</b> a computer system capable of assembling, storing, manipulating, and displaying geographically referenced information (ie spatial data).
<b>Green lane</b>	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.
<b>Highway</b>	The land over which a right of way runs.
<b>Highway Authority</b>	The body responsible for the maintaining of highways and keeping them free of obstructions. In Oxfordshire it is the County Council.
<b>Highways Agency</b>	Government agency responsible for trunk roads and motorways.
<b>LAF</b>	<b>Local Access Forum</b> 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).
<b>Landfill tax</b>	A tax on landfill operators, part of which helps to fund projects in the local area
<b>LTP</b>	<b>Local Transport Plan</b> Five year strategic plan covering highways and transport within Oxfordshire.
<b>National Trail</b>	Long distance route supported by the Countryside Agency.
<b>National Trust</b>	Charity that looks after nationally important property.
<b>NFU</b>	<b>National Farmers' Union</b>
<b>ORPA</b>	<b>Other Route with Public Access</b> A non-statutory designation route shown by the OS on their Landranger and Explorer mapping. Generally includes unsurfaced UCRs.
<b>OS</b>	<b>Ordnance Survey</b> Government owned company that produces and licences map based information.
<b>OCAF</b>	<b>Oxfordshire Countryside Access Forum</b> – see LAF

Glossary of terms

<b>Permissive path</b>	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.
<b>PCT</b>	<b>Primary Care Trusts</b> The way that the National Health's services are delivered within an geographic or administrative area.
<b>Private Right of Way</b>	A right of way for an individual or any group other than the public at large.
<b>PPO</b>	<b>Public Path Order</b> Legal order which creates, extinguishes or diverts a footpath or bridleway.
<b>Public Right of Way</b>	A right of passage by the public over the highway for the purpose of passing and repassing and for incidental reasonable purposes.
<b>Quiet Lanes</b>	Countryside Agency scheme aimed at maintaining the character of minor rural roads by seeking to contain rising traffic growth.
<b>RA</b>	<b>Ramblers' Association</b>
<b>Recreational use</b>	Using the rights of way network for informal enjoyment or exercise.
<b>Restricted Byway</b>	Highway open to all traffic except mechanically propelled vehicles.
<b>RDS</b>	<b>Rural Development Service</b> 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.
<b>Right to Roam</b>	A commonly used term used to describe the new rights of access to open country and registered common land Introduced under the CROW Act.
<b>Signpost</b>	See Fingerpost
<b>Spatial</b>	Relating to distribution, distance, direction, areas and other aspects of space on the Earth's surface.
<b>Surveying Authority</b>	The body responsible for the preparation and upkeep of the DMS.
<b>SUSTRANS</b>	<b>SUSTainable TRANsport</b> 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.
<b>TROT</b>	<b>Toll Rides (Off Road) Trust</b> Charity that establishes pay-to-use permissive routes for equestrians.
<b>Tourism providers</b>	Includes tourist attractions, destination marketing organisations and tourism officers working for local authorities.
<b>UCR</b>	<b>Unclassified Road or Unclassified County Road</b> These are minor highways, sometimes surfaced. They are generally maintainable at public expense.
<b>Utilitarian routes</b>	Path which is used by people going about their daily lives e.g. used to get to school, work, bus stops and local facilities.
<b>Waymark</b>	A means of showing the route of a public right of way, especially at junctions with other rights 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. Footpaths are waymarked by yellow arrows, bridleways with blue, byways with red and currently RUPPs are marked by green arrows.