

Active and Healthy Travel - Greenways

There are 4,000km of Public Rights of Way (PRoW) throughout Oxfordshire. Many of these are unsurfaced and of an uncertain standard but with great potential for transformation to high quality multi-user slow speed routes. There are also minor rural roads, unsurfaced roads, canal towpaths, disused railway lines, cycle paths, parkland and areas of open countryside. If better linked and managed these could provide a set of high-quality dedicated cycling and walking corridors. These could provide a greater range of residents and visitors with active recreation, social use and travel whilst also providing benefits for habitats and wildlife. We call these 'Oxfordshire Greenways'.

In line with the aims of the Oxfordshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan the intention is to improve, combine, link, and promote a set of Oxfordshire Greenways. These will deliver higher quality routes for mostly car-free active recreation and some daily journeys. Families with younger children, people who need easier access, horse riders and carriage drivers, and those people less confident in using bicycles on roads could especially benefit from these places. Greenways would be places to gain confidence, experience nature and farming, and sharing spaces away from the noise, pollution and speed of motor vehicles.

Benefits

- **Improved public health and wellbeing** - Walkers, cyclists and equestrians are all vulnerable road users and may be affected by vehicle speed, frequency and driver behaviour. Oxfordshire Greenways would be free to use and could play an important role in giving opportunities for outdoor physical and social activity for non-motorised users on routes that are more attractive to inexperienced people or those that need to be assured of a certain standard of accessibility
- **Reduced car use** - Where there are safe and well-managed alternative routes this can provide choices for short to medium local journeys to work, school and local facilities, and for longer recreational trips when sections are combined
- **Support economic sustainability** - A network of Greenways can support residents and visitors to explore and enjoy their local areas and be part of the attractions that Oxfordshire offers businesses and tourists as a destination, home and workplace.
- **Improve and wherever possible enhance the impacts of transport on the local built and natural environment** - Modal shift away from cars helps reduce carbon emissions and provides healthy living benefits. The availability of off-road networks can reduce some conflicts with motorised vehicles and increasing the amount of traffic free routes for walkers, cyclists and horse riders, especially families, can help build confidence and levels of activity. Greenways can be designed and managed to provide and improve habitats, biodiversity and landscapes.

Potential challenges

Landowner engagement - PRoW usually run over private land and landowner agreement is normally needed to secure additional rights e.g. riding bikes or horses along footpaths or widening existing routes. Compulsory processes are an option but given the potential community benefits to farmers and landowners, agreements are normally the best solution.

- **Funding improvement and development works** - With the exception of larger road and river crossing structures, most unsealed surface PRow and Greenway work is lower specification and simpler design which can help to keep costs comparatively low. The focus on increased accessibility for communities, visitors and those with less confidence and agility may make the Oxfordshire Greenways concept attractive to third sector grant givers e.g. Heritage Lottery Fund and Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment as well as government funding sources e.g. Defra and DfT community and transport schemes.
- **Repair and ongoing maintenance** - In order to sustain increased levels of use, repair and maintenance will have to be timely and appropriate and to a given standard across the entire Greenway route. This means additional funds may need to be included into any funding bids and a high standard of initial design and construction. A means of prioritising repair and maintenance activities will need to be agreed and this could involve communities and volunteers as well as land managers and authorities in a shared approach.
- **Promotion, engagement and education** – As part of their establishment, communities and stakeholders can be involved in local greenway design and specification. They can also support operation and play an important role in publicising and promoting the availability and benefits of the routes to local and wider communities online, in person and through publications. Children and young people, people with reduced mobility, as well as those from minority ethnic backgrounds need to be enabled to use the routes with confidence as part of their daily lives.
- **Popularity of Greenways** could bring its own challenges such as conflict between different user groups.



Examples from a Loire Valley "Voie Verte" greenway - Integrated and signed 20km route from Les Rosiers-Sur-Loire to Saumer comprising riverside path, road maintenance track, traffic-separated bridge and town road (all images courtesy P. Harris)

Question 2

Active & Healthy Travel: Greenways - What do you think?

Do Greenways sound like a good idea? Would you or people you know, use them? Could they help mitigate the effects of private car ownership upon the environment, congestion and people's health?

To respond please use the online consultation form.