

Appendix **B**

Central Bedfordshire Council

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**Central
Bedfordshire**

Your Countryside

The Outdoor Access Improvement Plan for
Central Bedfordshire
2013 to 2031



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Foreword

Central Bedfordshire Council has a critical role in the management of access to the natural environment, both through the rights of way network and through council owned heritage and countryside sites. These act as gateways, encouraging people to develop a sense of place and explore the countryside on their doorstep.

This document provides a clear direction for the current and future management of countryside access and demonstrates how it will:

- Support and enhance Central Bedfordshire's economic potential
- Seek to provide access to high quality greenspace in and around new housing and areas of population growth
- Improve residents' quality of life, health and well being
- Reduce our impact on the environment

Our countryside and heritage sites offer communities and visitors opportunities for recreation, learning and exercise. These sites are connected to a wide range of public rights of way – footpaths, bridleways and byways, which provide an exciting opportunity to explore the special landscapes of the area, ranging from the Chiltern Hills and the Greensand Ridge through to the rivers valleys of the Ouzel, Flit and Ivel.

We recognise that during times of economic hardship, access to free and accessible facilities are particularly important, especially for less well off people and families. Access to our network of rights of way and many countryside sites is not only free but offers something for all the family; we therefore encourage you to go out and explore your countryside.



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Executive Summary

Your Countryside

The Outdoor Access Improvement Plan (OAIP) provides a clear vision of how access to the countryside through countryside sites and public rights of way can contribute to Central Bedfordshire being a great place to live and work. The vision focuses on :

- **Providing access** to a range of high quality green spaces and the wider countryside through a well managed Rights of Way network
- **Involving local communities** in the management of the countryside
- **Raising public confidence and understanding** of countryside access
- **Providing improved biodiversity and heritage management**, integrated with public access.
- **Increasing use and enjoyment** of the Central Bedfordshire countryside for fresh air, relaxation, recreation, health and exercise

The OAIP has been developed to support a range of key local and national priorities and strategies. Deliverables will support the achievement of three key council priorities¹; enhancing Central Bedfordshire, promoting health and wellbeing and providing better infrastructure. Together with the Leisure Strategy, Development Strategy and Green Infrastructure Plans the OAIP will form part of a suite of documents which will plan and deliver countryside access and greenspace in Central Bedfordshire.

There is extensive evidence supporting the need for an OAIP to strategically manage countryside access in Central Bedfordshire. Consultation shows that there are a diverse range of countryside users with different priorities, interests and requirements. There is also an array of legal requirements, statutory duties and agreed standards applying to elements of countryside access. The OAIP provides a considered approach to meeting duties and prioritising differing demands within existing resources and a difficult economic and financial climate.

The main body of the OAIP divides countryside access responsibilities into five thematic chapters; connecting spaces, breathing spaces, local spaces, healthy spaces and growing spaces.

¹ Delivering Your Priorities: The Council's Plan for Central Bedfordshire 2012-16

Chapter 3 '*Connecting Spaces*' demonstrates the importance of the Public Rights of Way network in providing local access to amenities, opportunities for exercise and corridors for wildlife. It also outlines the unique challenges for the rights of way network and presents a range of actions which will ensure that the network is well maintained. Priorities include:

- The resolution of definitive map anomalies, where paths have historically been obstructed or built upon
- Improving network connectivity, particularly in relation to bridleways.

Chapter 4 '*Breathing Spaces*' describes the expansive network of greenspace and countryside sites that Central Bedfordshire has to offer. 57% of residents access the wider countryside on a daily or weekly basis and evidence shows that users value the peace and tranquillity of the countryside above all. Greenspaces are key resources for learning and wildlife but are also important in attracting tourists and supporting the rural economy.

The priority for this chapter is greenspace masterplanning to provide long-term management proposals for countryside features. Other priorities include improving the network of greenspaces and improving access to both small community greenspaces and large countryside sites.

Chapter 5 '*Local Spaces*' encourages community ownership and involvement with local sites and rights of way as these spaces are shown to "*provide communities with a sense of place and belonging... whilst supporting social cohesion and inclusive society.*"² The chapter also celebrates the role of local communities and volunteers in managing greenspaces and prioritises both the expansion of the volunteer network and the improvement of support and training for volunteers.

Chapter 6 '*Healthy Spaces*' identifies extensive research linking access to the countryside with increased levels of physical activity and significant health benefits. Maximising access to the countryside is shown to impact on obesity, a range of physical health issues and on mental health; on a national scale it offers considerable savings to the NHS. Central Bedfordshire's extensive network of greenspaces, countryside sites and rights of way offers people excellent free opportunities for increasing physical activity through walking, cycling, running and play. Through the

² Green Space – Understanding the contribution parks and greenspaces can make to improving peoples lives (2011)

OAIP and the Leisure Strategy the council aims to extend opportunities for physical activity and play and promote the health benefits of accessing the countryside.

Chapter 7 '*Growing Spaces*' identifies the importance of the Development Strategy in creating new countryside sites and rights of way and improving connectivity between developments, green spaces and amenities. It highlights the importance of the Community Infrastructure Levy in ensuring new communities have appropriate access to greenspaces and the need to ensure that new development proposals adequately safeguard, enhance and develop the network of greenspaces and rights of way.

The OAIP has identified five key projects which offer considerable benefits to countryside access and highlighted their significance as flagship projects. Four projects are thematic; offering benefits across the council area. One project is site based and has been recognised as a Flagship Project due to its scale and the significant benefits it offers the local community.

In addition, a range of deliverables have been identified and captured within the Action Plan. The Action Plan will last for ten years and will be reviewed and revised every five years to ensure deliverables remain appropriate and relevant throughout the life of the OAIP. The overarching plan will cover the period up to 2031.

Many of the aims and deliverables contained within the OAIP and Action Plan are resource dependent. Some can be achieved within existing resources whilst some will require additional funding or support. The OAIP has considered ways in which the funding gap can be minimised and this is outlined within the Funding Statement contained in Section 9.

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Context

Vision and Key Priorities



1 Context

Vision and Key Priorities

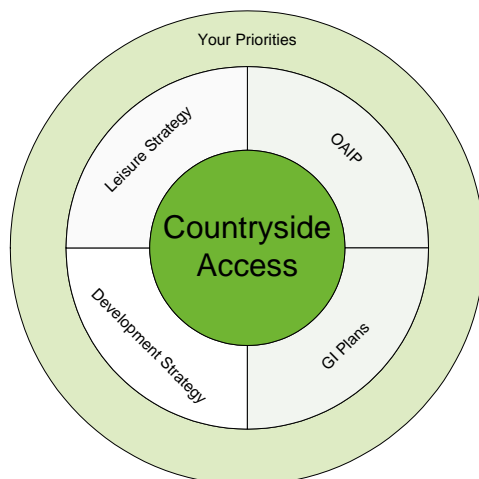
1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 What is the Outdoor Access Improvement Plan?

This Outdoor Access Improvement Plan (OAIP) will focus on outdoor and countryside access in Central Bedfordshire for the period 2013 to 2031.

The strategy includes a 10-year action plan that will direct activity during the period 2013 to 2023 and will provide a high level steer for the annual rolling Service Business Plan. The Action Plan will be regularly reviewed up to 2031 to ensure that the programme of work aligns with relevant council priorities, national influences and emerging evidence and research.

The OAIP will provide the policies and actions which will aim to deliver increased countryside access and community involvement. The OAIP is forward thinking and aspirational, however, there is also recognition that there may not be enough resources to deliver all of the projects, policies and actions at once. The council will seek to prioritise projects over the plan period and direct resources accordingly. The council will work creatively to seek other ways of working and funding sources in order to deliver on the plan.



The OAIP will form part of a suite of documents, which will plan and deliver countryside access and greenspace in Central Bedfordshire. The OAIP focuses on delivering and managing council owned and / or managed provision. It will complement the Leisure Strategy which will provide a comprehensive picture of all leisure facilities and opportunities within Central Bedfordshire and guide provision through new

development. It will also link with Green Infrastructure Plans which identify existing greenspace assets and future opportunities, resulting in the identification of a GI 'network' and 'priority areas' for future investment. There is also a key link with the Development Strategy which provides the framework for growth in the area.

Statutory Duty

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 gave Local Authorities a statutory duty to publish and review, at least every ten years, a 'Rights of Way Improvement Plan' (ROWIP). The aim of this Plan is to fulfil the council's duty to create greater access to the countryside for social and economic benefits, and to protect the environment.

The statutory guidance requires authorities to develop proposals to improve and manage their networks to meet the present, and likely future, needs of the public; looking at ways in which they can benefit health, transport, recreation, tourism and the local economy. Authorities must also develop a ROWIP within the context of other relevant plans and strategies - including healthy living, leisure, recreation, sport, tourism, economic regeneration, transport, planning and community strategies – so that they 'influence' these areas of responsibility. It also explicitly requires assessment of opportunities for exercise and other forms of 'open area recreation and enjoyment of the area'.

The OAIP will incorporate the information that would usually be contained within a ROWIP (and fulfil the statutory duty), but will also go further; building upon this statutory platform and providing the linkages and synergies with other forms of countryside provision.

The Legacy of the OAIP 2006-2011

In 2006, the former Bedfordshire County Council created an OAIP that received a national award for innovation from Natural England. This Plan looked holistically at outdoor access and rights of way, managing and providing access to the countryside and included the statutory 'Rights of Way Improvement Plan'. The original OAIP transferred as an adopted plan to Central Bedfordshire Council, as one of the two successive unitary authorities.

Outdoor Access Improvement Plan 2013 - 2031

The 2013 – 2031 OAIP will replace the existing OAIP 2006 – 2011 and continue to look at rights of way and outdoor access in the broader holistic sense.

Green space and access to the wider countryside is a central component of providing sustainable communities, ensuring that Central Bedfordshire continues to be a green and pleasant place to live and work. The new plan will have a key role in helping people and communities explore and understand Central Bedfordshire's countryside. The plan will seek to ensure communities are involved in the stewardship and management of countryside access and countryside sites.

This Plan will act as the cornerstone 'strategy' for countryside and outdoor access management for Central Bedfordshire and for the delivery of services and projects for the period 2013 to 2031. This period that the OAIP will operate is in parallel with the Council's' Development Strategy and Leisure Strategy.

1.2 Vision - Central Bedfordshire as a Great Place to Live and Work

This document outlines, in the broadest sense, the wide range of countryside access that the council manages and supports – from Country Parks and Rights of Way to woodlands and wildlife sites – and the range of benefits that they bring. The challenge for local authorities is to provide a greater focus on efficiency, productivity and effective expenditure in times of economic challenge. Countryside spaces must provide a demonstrable contribution to improving outcomes that really matter to local people, for example health and wellbeing, the local economy, community safety and most importantly the sense of satisfaction with their local area.

Our vision focuses on Central Bedfordshire as a great place to live and work, which we intend to deliver by:

- **Providing access** to a range of high quality green spaces and the wider countryside through a well managed Rights of Way network
- **Involving local communities** in the management of the countryside
- **Raising public confidence and understanding** of countryside access
- **Providing improved Biodiversity and Heritage management**, integrated with public access.
- **Increasing use and enjoyment** of the Central Bedfordshire countryside for fresh air, relaxation, recreation, health and exercise

We want the council's accessible countryside and green spaces to be:

- **Connecting Spaces: Rights of Way**
...taking you through the landscape
- **Breathing Spaces: Sites and Greenspaces**
...oases of calm at the heart of your community
- **Local Spaces: Community Involvement and Participation**
...the green space on our doorstep
- **Healthy Spaces: Health and Wellbeing**
...which encourage us to get active
- **Growing Spaces: The Countryside and Growth**
...sustaining our communities

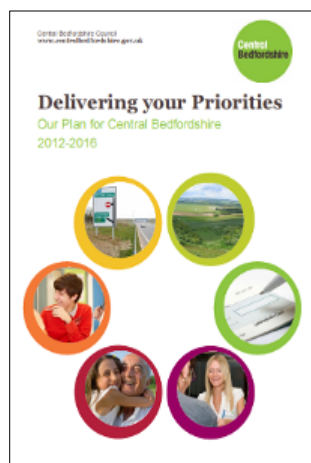
1.3 Key Priorities: The Local and National Context

1.3.1 Local Priorities - Central Bedfordshire

The OAIP complements and supports many of the key strategies and priorities within Central Bedfordshire. The OAIP will be regularly reviewed to ensure that the plan continues to be strategically aligned with the priorities of the council and its key partners.

Delivering your Priorities: The council's Plan for Central Bedfordshire 2012 – 2016

Residents have given the council clear and consistent feedback about their attitudes to the authority and the area. In response to this, Central Bedfordshire Council is



committed to six key priorities, three of which are key drivers for the OAIP:

- Enhancing Central Bedfordshire – creating jobs, managing growth, protecting the countryside and enabling businesses to grow.
- Promoting health and well being and protecting the vulnerable.
- Better infrastructure

The OAIP will support the delivery of these objectives through a range of specific actions to protect the countryside, improve greenspace facilities and encourage increased access to the countryside for exercise and recreational purposes. These will all contribute to Central Bedfordshire being a great place to live and work.

Development Strategy

The Development Strategy is a new planning policy document that will set the framework for growth across Central Bedfordshire. It will set out how much development (housing, employment, retail etc) the council needs to plan for and broadly where it should go. It will also establish detailed policies to determine planning applications.

Development Strategy Policies relevant to the OAIP

Accessible Open Space	Development in the Green Belt
Leisure and Open Space provision	Formally Designated Important Open Space
Public Rights of Way	Other Areas of Open Space within Settlements
Local Green Space	High Quality Development
Equestrian Development And the Keeping And Breeding Of Livestock	Green Infrastructure, Forest of Marston Vale and Nature Improvement Areas
Landscape	Biodiversity and Geo-diversity
Woodland, Trees and Hedgerows	Historic Environment

The relationship between countryside access and development will be dealt with in more detail in the 'Growing Spaces' Section.

The Sustainable Community Strategy

The Sustainable Community Strategy is based on a shared long-term vision for Central Bedfordshire that has been developed by Central Bedfordshire Together, which is the name for Central Bedfordshire's Local Strategic Partnership (LSP).

There are obvious connections between outdoor access and the priorities 'Promoting Health' and 'Getting around and caring for a green and clean environment'. These connections will be explored in the relevant sections of the OAIP.



Leisure Strategy

The purpose of the Leisure Strategy 2013-2031 is to provide a robust evidence base on which to base planning standards and secure appropriate leisure facilities & S106/CIL, to accompany new development.

It plays a key role in supporting CBC's responsibility for public health from 2014; ensuring sustainable, high quality sport and physical activity infrastructure and opportunities to enable residents to live active lives, prevent ill health, improve overall health & wellbeing, and reduce care costs. A key objective is to ensure the number of adults taking part in sport and physical activity remains above the national average

Green Infrastructure Plans

Green Infrastructure (GI) is a strategically planned and managed network of green spaces, access routes, wildlife habitats, landscapes and historic features which meet the needs of existing and new communities.

Green Infrastructure Plans identify both existing assets and future opportunities, resulting in the identification of a GI 'network' and 'priority areas' for future investment. GI planning has taken place at 3 different levels in Bedfordshire:

- Strategic Level – The Bedfordshire & Luton Strategic GI Plan (2007)
- 'Middle' or 'District' Level – The Mid Bedfordshire GI Plan (2009) and the Luton & Southern Bedfordshire GI Plan (2010)
- Parish/Town Level GI Plans

The Bedfordshire and Luton Green Infrastructure Consortium (GIC) is a wide, cross-sector partnership that has brought together a range of environment sector partners, driven by the need to ensure that growth planned and being delivered across the area is sustainable. In 2012 the GIC applied for, and secured, 'Local Nature Partnership' status from Central Government.

Local Nature Partnerships (LNP) are a key Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) commitment. The ambition for LNP is that they will help their local area to manage the natural environment as a system and to embed its value in local decision-making for the benefit of nature, people, and the economy.

The Forest Plan - Forest of Marston Vale

The Marston Vale Community Forest is one of 12 Community Forests in England that were established in 1990 by the then Countryside Commission as a pilot project to demonstrate the potential contribution of environmental improvement to economic and social regeneration.

The headline target is to achieve 30% tree cover by 2031, however, regeneration is the key driver behind the environmental transformation with social, economic and environmental benefits both now and for generations to come.

The creation of the Forest of Marston Vale is guided by the 'Forest Plan'³, a non-statutory strategic framework prepared through extensive consultation and endorsed by a wide range of stakeholders, from local communities to Government.

Notably the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)⁴ has given specific support for Community Forests stating that they "...offer valuable opportunities for improving the environment around towns, by upgrading the landscape and providing for recreation and wildlife".

The council shares the aspirations of the Forest of Marston Vale and has designed actions and policies contained within the OAIP to actively support the Forest Plan.

Economic Development Plan

The council manages an extensive network of countryside sites and rights of way across Central Bedfordshire, which enable people to access green space and the rural environment. This network is key to realising the economic benefits of rural and environmental tourism, and is an intrinsic part of Central Bedfordshire's economic development.

Business interests have highlighted the area's 'attractive surroundings' as a strength and the Local Economic Assessment identifies 'considerable opportunity' to develop tourism and leisure businesses and enhance the 'high quality environment' as a means of supporting local job growth and increasing retail and leisure spend in the area.

³ The Forest Plan, The Marston Vale Trust 2000

⁴ National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Department for Communities and Local Government 2012

The Central Bedfordshire Council Economic Development Plan (November 2011) recognises the key role that rural businesses play in Central Bedfordshire's economy. It aims to safeguard rural employment sites, support rural business diversification and provide development opportunities while striking a balance with the need to protect our countryside. Countryside Access can help to provide the link between the economy and countryside; achieving benefits for both.

The relationship between countryside access and the economy will be dealt with throughout the OAIP and in Section 7 - '*Growing Spaces*'.

Health and Wellbeing Strategy

The Central Bedfordshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2012-2016 prioritises the reduction of childhood obesity and strives to help people make healthy lifestyle choices. Both priorities identify that increasing opportunities for physical activity will be key to achieving them.

Evidence demonstrates that access to the natural environment improves health and wellbeing, prevents disease, helps people recover from illness and reduces health inequalities.⁵ Experiencing nature in the outdoors can help tackle obesity, coronary heart disease and mental health problems⁶ and therefore accessing rights of way and countryside sites for walking, sports, play and recreation could significantly contribute to achieving health priorities.

From April 2013, Directors of Public Health will be employed by local authorities; further strengthening the link between the health agenda and council services. Activity aiming to connect people with nature for the benefit of public health will be increasingly important.

The relationship of countryside access and health will be dealt with in more detail in Section 6 - '*Healthy Spaces*'.

⁵ Fair Society, Healthy Lives, The Marmot Review, 2010.

⁶ Natural England – Health and Natural Environments, An Evidence Based Information Pack, March 2012

Community Engagement Strategy

The Central Bedfordshire Community Engagement Strategy 2010 – 2013 will enable Central Bedfordshire Council to establish a new relationship with individuals and organisations and help communities understand the tough choices and decisions ahead. It will also manage their expectations about the service levels provided by the public sector in the future.

The strategy is based on five key principles, which are:

- Giving more people more opportunities to influence decisions
- Enabling Ward Councillors to be leaders, in and for, their communities
- Enhancing the role of Town and Parish Council's
- Building the capacity of local people to engage
- Ensuring a strategic and joined-up, coordinated partnership approach

The relationship between countryside access and community engagement will be explored in more detail in Section 5 - '*Local Spaces*'.

Local Transport Plan

The Local Transport Plan (LTP) forms a long-term framework for investment in transport infrastructure and services across Central Bedfordshire. It is a statutory requirement of the authority to produce and maintain the Plan, which considers the needs of all forms of transport, particularly walking, cycling, buses, rail and car use.

The time period for implementing the LTP covers the period between April 2011 and March 2026 to enable a strategic approach to the delivery of transport schemes and help secure lasting changes in travel behaviour.

The LTP sets out a long-term framework for investment in transport across Central Bedfordshire. The LTP, supporting thematic strategies (including the Walking and Cycling Strategies) and Local Area Transport Plans (LATP) seek to enable people to make more informed travel choices and reduce reliance on the car; increasing the number of people walking and cycling.

Local Transport Plans should recommend the development of the Rights of Way network to allow multi use in order to open up important new routes, connecting communities and providing access to the authorities green spaces including its Country Parks and other leisure destinations.

Walking Strategy Objectives

Headline Objective: Increase the number of people walking

Improve the quality of the pedestrian environment

Improve the safety of pedestrians

Increase awareness of the benefits of walking

Cycling Strategy Objectives

Headline Objective: Increase the number of people cycling

Improve the quality of the cycling environment

Improve the safety and perceived safety of cycling

Increase awareness of the benefits of cycling

Increase access to a bicycle

1.3.2 National Priorities

This plan will demonstrate how countryside access can support national priorities, including localism, mental and physical health improvement, sustainability, housing growth as well as achieving benefits to the natural environment and the way that people engage with it.

Rights of Way

There are a number of national government strategies and plans that relate to rights of way and their management. These include:

- Rights of Way Improvement Plans (RoWIP) – Statutory Guidance to Local Highway Authorities in England (DEFRA Nov 2002)
- Local Transport Plan and RoWIP Integration (Natural England 2009)
- Guidance on Local Transport Plans (DfT 2009)
- Guidance on Local Transport Plans and the Natural Environment (Natural England 2009)
- The National Planning Policy Framework
- The Natural Choice – Natural Environment White Paper Natural England June 2011

Localism

The Localism Act 2011 devolves greater powers to council's and neighbourhoods and gives local communities more control over housing and planning decisions. The OAIP seeks ways to strengthen community involvement and ownership and explores this in more detail in Section 5 – '*Local Spaces*'

The Natural Environment

The Natural Environment White Paper, entitled *The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature*,⁷ provides the high-level recognition of the importance of nature and its benefits to the wider society. Priorities include:

- **Protecting and improving our natural environment** – stimulating joined up action to arrest the decline of habitats and species and the degradation of landscapes and move towards a net gain in the value of nature.
- **Growing a green economy** – promote a green and growing economy which not only uses natural capital in a responsible and fair way but also contributes to improving it. Growth will be green because it is intrinsically linked to the health of natural resources.
- **Reconnecting people and nature** – There should be fair and equal access to a good-quality natural environment, where more people will enjoy the benefits of nature and have the freedom to connect with it.

Planning and Growth

At the time of writing the OAIP the planning system in England and Wales was undergoing significant changes, most fundamentally the government announced that it proposed to abolish Regional Spatial Strategies in favour of more local planning decisions and has published a new 'National Planning Policy Framework' (NPPF) to replace the previous planning guidance and policies.

The NPPF recognises that access to good quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities. Information gained from quantitative or qualitative assessments of needs and opportunities should be used to set locally derived standards for the provision of open space, sports and recreational facilities. Planning policies should protect and enhance rights of way and access.

⁷ Published by DEFRA in June 2011

The National Planning Policy Framework Policies

Supporting a prosperous rural economy	Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
Promoting sustainable transport	Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
Promoting healthy communities	Conserving and enhancing the historic environment
Local Green Space	Facilitating the sustainable use of minerals
Protecting Green Belt land	

Supporting a Strong Rural Economy

The Natural Environment White Paper identified Government aspirations to “value the economic and social benefits of a healthy natural environment” and to reconnect people with nature, stating:

“...we want to see a shift away from people using their cars to get to national parks and open spaces, with more people choosing public transport, cycling or walking. There is evidence that cyclists and walkers spend more in the local economy than visitors by car, benefiting local communities. New cycling and walking routes can have a positive effect on the local economy.”⁸

The White Paper stated that the mechanism to achieve this would be the £560m Local Sustainable Transport Fund. To this end Central Bedfordshire Council applied for and was awarded £4.9 million from the Sustainable Transport Fund to encourage walking and cycling, improve public transport and make better connections between different forms of sustainable transport in the south of the County.

⁸ ‘The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature’, DEFRA June 2011, p.52

Biodiversity

Legislation to protect wildlife in the UK includes the Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA 1981) the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) Act 2000 and the Habitat Regulations (amended 2007/2009) provide for the designation and protection of 'European Sites' and 'Species'.

Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 gives the council a legal obligation to its management of the Rights of Way and Permissive Path Network, Country Parks, Nature Reserves, Green Spaces to ensure it *"in exercising its functions, has regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity"*.

Managing public access to the countryside also requires reference to the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) to conserve and enhance biodiversity within the UK in line with international commitments and Planning Policy Statement 9 (PPS9): Biodiversity and Geological Conservation which highlights that Local Planning Authorities should refuse permission where harm to protected or notable species or their habitats would result unless the need for, and benefits of, the development clearly outweigh that harm.

Health

The Department of Health Strategy Healthy Lives, Healthy People⁹ highlights that many premature deaths and illnesses could be prevented through improving lifestyles; citing an increase in physical activity as one of the three key changes that would impact on prevention of cancers and circulatory illnesses. It also states that improving the environment in which people live can make healthier lifestyles easier to achieve; an unattractive environment and a lack of green space prevents physical activity and contact with nature being part of everyday life.

Rights of way and countryside sites provide ideal opportunities for low cost exercise through walking, a range of sports, and more generally play and recreation; contributing to national priorities to increase physical activity and address lifestyle and health issues.

⁹ Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Our strategy for public health in England, 2010

1.4 Delivery of the OAIP

Fundamental to the delivery of the OAIP is the Action Plan that details the priorities drawn out from the main themes of the OAIP. The Action Plan will detail the work streams and projects, with timescales and the resources required for delivery. Structured into five sections and with thirteen aims which represent the priority actions across the initial 10 year period. It will be updated every 5 years during the OAIP period. The aims and actions are detailed within the individual chapters and summarised below:

Chapter 6: Connecting spaces- Public Rights of Way

- Aim 1 - A Well Maintained Network
- Aim 2 - A Better Defined and Recorded Network
- Aim 3 - A Well Connected Network
- Aim 4 - A More Accessible Network

Chapter 7: Breathing spaces- Sites and Greenspaces

- Aim 5 - Well Managed Countryside Spaces
- Aim 6 - Commons, Village Greens and Access Areas will be legally defined with people understanding their rights

Chapter 8: Local spaces- Community Involvement and Participation

- Aim 7 – More people volunteering to support OAIP objectives
- Aim 8 – Increased Town and Parish Council involvement in countryside sites and rights of way management and development
- Aim 9 – The council will contribute to supporting the rural economy
- Aim 10 – More people have access to good quality information and are aware of countryside access close to them
- Aim 11 – Support and Provide Environmental Education opportunities

Chapter 9: Healthy spaces- Health and Wellbeing

- Aim 12 – Countryside Spaces and Rights of Way will facilitate play, health, wellbeing and physical activities

Chapter 10: Growing spaces - Countryside and the Growth Agenda

- Aim 13 – The quantity and quality of rights of way and greenspaces meet the needs of current and future communities

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Assessment of Needs

Consultation and Standards

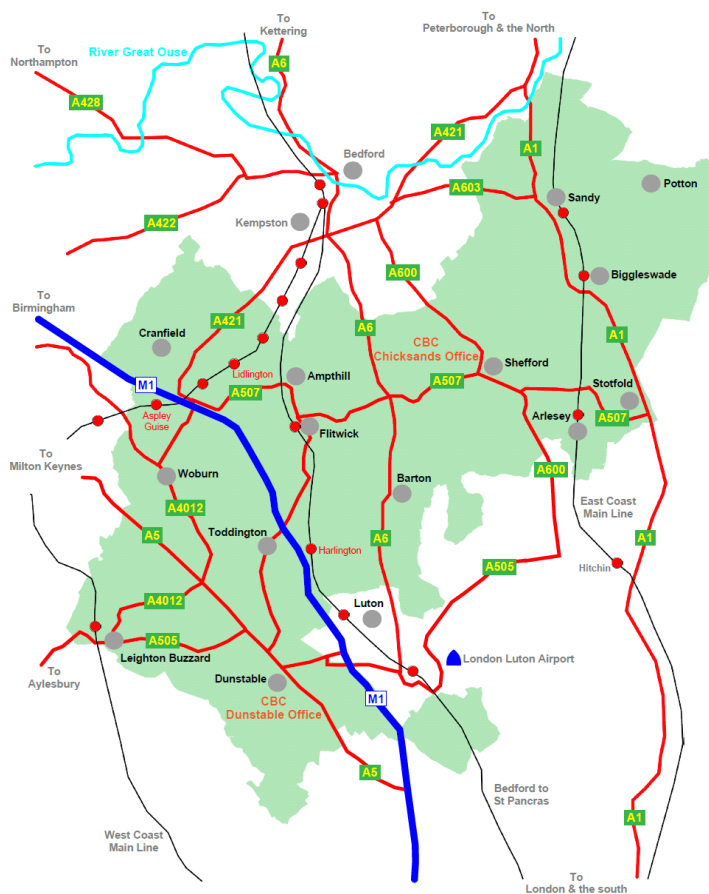


2 Assessment of Needs

Consultation and Standards

2.1 About Central Bedfordshire

Central Bedfordshire is a varied area comprising a mixture of rural countryside, attractive villages, and small to medium sized towns. It is well connected, being traversed by the M1, A1, A5 and A6 as well as the East Coast Mainline, West Coast Mainline and the Midland Mainline. London Luton Airport is also in close proximity.



Covering 716 square kilometres, Central Bedfordshire currently has a population of approximately 254,400 and is the 17th largest unitary authority in England¹⁰. Central Bedfordshire is one of the least densely populated areas and is classified as predominantly rural with just over half the population living in rural areas.

¹⁰ 17th Largest authority based on population size, 2011 Census

Much of rural Central Bedfordshire is of high landscape, biodiversity and historic environment value with extensive tracts of high-grade agricultural land and each year over 1.5 million people visit Bedfordshire's countryside and heritage sites. The area includes a surprisingly diverse range of landscapes including river valleys (Ouse, Ouzel, Hit, Ivel and Flit), the Marston Vale, the Greensand Ridge and the Chiltern Hills. The area also includes three National Nature Reserves at Barton Hills, Knocking Hoe and Kingswood at Heath and Reach. To the South it includes part of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which offers a stunning backdrop to the large urban centres of Luton, Dunstable and Houghton Regis and to the north one of 12 national Community Forests, the 'Forest of Marston Vale'. A number of the countryside sites are Scheduled Ancient Monuments such as Five Knolls, Dunstable and Totternhoe Knolls. In addition some land outside of the main towns and villages is designated as Green Belt.

People can enjoy Outdoor Access in Central Bedfordshire through:

- The public rights of way network and 'open country' (land where the public have a 'right to roam').
- Publicly accessible spaces, such as country parks, most nature reserves, local green spaces and commons.

The authority works in partnership with many organisations to support and encourage a holistic approach to access to the countryside. The council manages the public rights of way network and much other land to which there is legal public access.

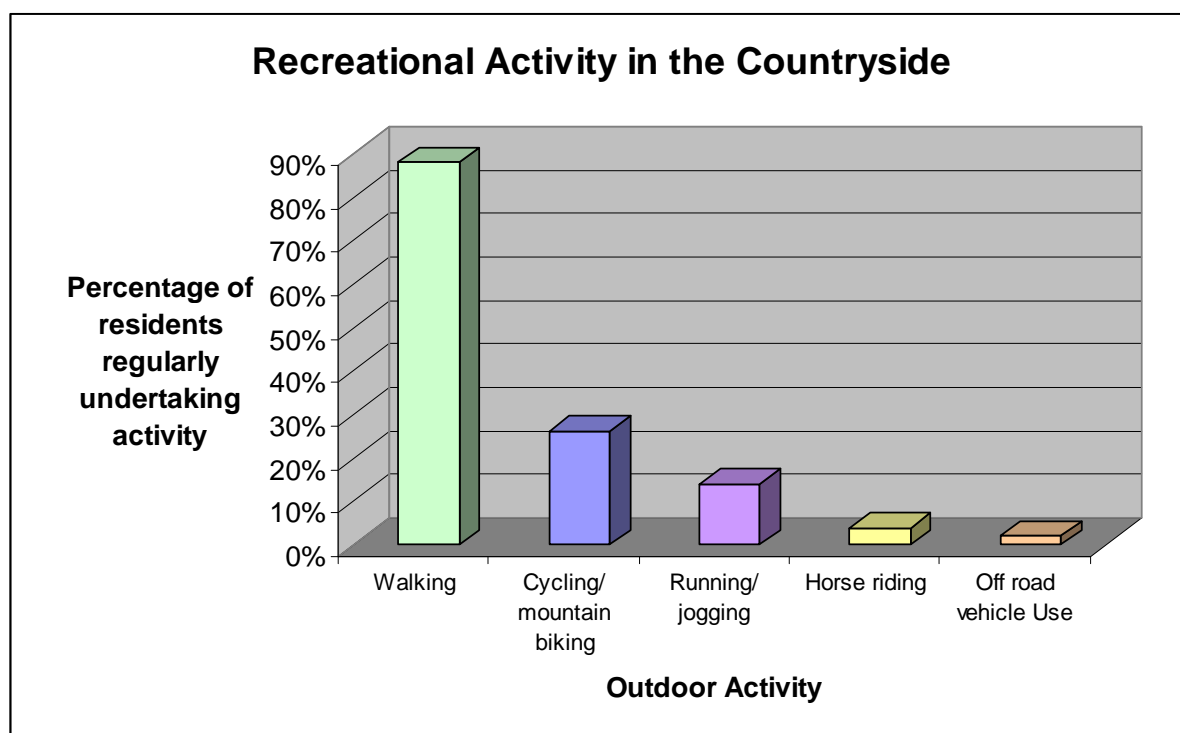
2.2 How do People Use the Countryside?

Our understanding of how Central Bedfordshire countryside is used stems from a range of surveys and research studies undertaken since 2003. Older survey information has been reinforced and augmented with more recent, smaller scale studies which validate the use of original statistics referenced in this document.

Local Residents Survey (2003)

In 2003 a local resident's survey was conducted for Bedfordshire (ADAS 2003). Its aim was to understand and prioritise the needs, views and issues facing the residents of Bedfordshire with regard to rights of way and access to the countryside.

Of the total population of Bedfordshire¹¹ 96% of people accessed the countryside. The table below shows the types of recreational outdoor activity these residents regularly undertake in the countryside.



Of those residents who undertook the various activities within the countryside, 63% indicated that they used footpaths, bridleways, cycle paths or other tracks rather than pavements or roads always or often, whilst a further 26% sometimes used them. Only 10% rarely or never used them. In addition, 83% of the residents visit country parks at some time with 20% visiting once or twice a month or more often.

¹¹ ADAS consulting Ltd – Local Residents Survey (2003)

Residents were more likely to walk in the countryside than they were to visit country parks. The likelihood of visiting a country park was however substantially higher than the likelihood of a resident horse riding, cycling, running or taking part in off road vehicle use.

These figures are in line with national figures reported by Natural England in their 2010 study to understand how and why people engage with the natural environment¹². This survey additionally identified that 66% of visits to the countryside (including parks) were to places within two miles (3.2km) of the starting point and 81% within 5 miles (8km), highlighting the importance of accessible green space close to home.

The majority of countryside visits were undertaken on foot, by people living locally within rural or urban fringe areas, with the main reasons for visiting being exercising dogs, personal health and exercise, relaxing and unwinding, enjoying fresh air, pleasant weather and scenery, peace and quiet and enjoying wildlife. 94% of those surveyed agreed that having green space close to where they live is important to them and is an important part of their life.

Leisure Strategy Telephone Survey¹³

A telephone survey of Central Bedfordshire residents was undertaken by the council to support the development of the Leisure Strategy. The survey showed that 17% of respondents visit country parks at least once per week and a further 23% visit these sites at least once per month. 36% of respondents to the telephone survey never visit country parks. The research indicates that while the proportion of residents who do actually visit country parks is higher than all other types of open space (with the exception of large recreational areas), visits are made less frequently than to some more local facilities.

A comparison between this research and the survey carried out by ADAS suggests that while the frequency of visits for those using country parks has increased since 2003, a higher percentage of residents now do not visit country parks at all. This may indicate a need to increase access and improve information about Country Parks.

¹² Natural England – Monitor of engagement with the natural environment – first year results (2010)

¹³ Telephone survey carried out by Public Perspectives on behalf of CBC in preparation for Leisure Strategy, 2012

2.3 What Do People Value?

Bedfordshire Voice Panel

When surveyed, 97% of the Bedfordshire Voice panel¹⁴ stated that they regard their local countryside as important to their quality of life and their feelings about Bedfordshire as a place.

When asked to give an indication of the relative importance of green infrastructure to their own lives and to those of local communities, in the context of growth and development, those questioned attached weighting as follows:

Issue	High Priority%	Medium Priority%	Low Priority%
Provision of new ways of getting into the countryside	70	21	8
Provision of new Green Infrastructure – country parks, paths and greens	62	26	12
More improvement and development e.g. signage, surfaces for push/wheel chairs and children’s play areas	51	35	15
Supporting self service use e.g. maps and leaflets, website guidance, information promoting places and walks	50	37	12
Provision of more maintenance e.g. grass cutting, repairs to gates and seats	48	41	11

Access to the countryside for recreation was identified as the most important activity for Bedfordshire residents; when asked about their participation and engagement in a variety of activities it was the activity that they wanted most protected.

¹⁴ Bedfordshire Voice Panel – Access to the countryside survey (2007)

The 2011 survey of residents undertaken by Central Bedfordshire Council¹⁵ reinforced this finding with 42% of residents stating that country parks, open spaces and rights of way are important in making a place a good place to live. It was deemed a higher priority than many other activities and equal to crime and antisocial behaviour.

User Surveys

To understand the specific needs of countryside users within Central Bedfordshire, the council undertakes surveys of Countryside Site Users¹⁶. These identified improvements which would encourage more people to use greenspaces and the countryside, and included:

- Improved management of dog fouling and control
- Improved information, both generic and audience targeted
- Appropriate signage and way marking
- Public transport provision at an affordable cost
- Signed and secure car parking facilities
- Organised walks/events; picnicking facilities
- Accessibility for buggies and wheelchairs
- Increased volunteering opportunities

The OAIP and specific Site Management Plans will seek to undertake these improvements where appropriate.

Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt)

The ANGSt model was developed in the early 1990s as a tool to improve the access to, the naturalness of and the connectivity with greenspaces. Natural England reviewed the standard in 2008 and provided further guidance explaining how the standard should be applied in the report “Nature Nearby”, which was published in March 2010. ANGSt enables planners and greenspace managers to identify deficiencies in greenspace provision at various size thresholds, and to use this evidence to identify opportunities to improve provision through the land use planning system.

¹⁵ Central Bedfordshire Council – What residents think about the Council – October 2011

¹⁶ Countryside Site User Surveys (2005 onwards)

ANGSt recommends that everyone, wherever they live, should have an accessible natural greenspace of at least 2 Hectares (Ha) (4.9 acres) in size, no more than 300m from home, and at least one accessible 20Ha site within 1.2 miles (2km) of home. In 2011 Natural England produced an ANGSt assessment of the Bedfordshire which showed that at the 20Ha / 1.2 mile (2km) level, Central Bedfordshire is well provided for, with 89.6% of households meeting the standard. However, there is quite a low percentage (26.5%) of households living close to local greenspaces at the 2Ha / 300m level. Overall only 4.7% of households met all the ANGSt criteria.¹⁷

¹⁷ Analysis of accessible natural greenspace provision for Bedfordshire, Natural England 2011

Connecting Spaces: Rights of Way

...taking you through the landscape



3 Connecting Spaces: Rights of Way

...taking you through the landscape

Rights of way help to boost tourism and contribute to rural economies. They can also provide a convenient means of travelling, particularly for short journeys, in both rural and urban areas. They are important in the daily lives of many people who use them for fresh air and exercise on bicycle, on foot, on horseback or in a horse-drawn vehicle, to walk the dog, to improve their fitness, or to visit local shops and other facilities. Local authorities should regard public rights of way as an integral part of the complex of recreational and transport facilities within their area.

DEFRA (2012)

3.1 What are Connecting Spaces?

Connecting spaces are the routes that take you through the landscape and countryside. They are the paths that connect you to green spaces and to community facilities. They are primarily public rights of way, but also include permissive paths and cycle routes.

The 829 mile (1335km) public rights of way network is the vital link for residents and visitors to access the countryside from their communities and further afield. Footpaths, bridleways and byways are used as recreational routes for people to walk the dog, walk to the river or lake or access a green space or country park. They also have a utilitarian or transport use as direct links to community facilities such as shops, schools and pubs as well as routes between neighbouring communities.

In addition to the public rights of way, there are 20 miles (33 km) of permissive footpaths and 4.4 miles (7km) of permissive bridleways. These are routes that the landowner has allowed the public to use on a 'permission' basis which is enshrined in a formal agreement document with this council. These permissive paths often provide valuable links in the network where there are no rights of way or there is a gap in the network.

TYPES OF ROW IN CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE

ROW Type	Distance miles (km)	User allowed
Footpath (FP)	603 miles (971km)	A public right of way on foot only (with/without a dog or pushchair)
Bridleway (BW)	210 miles (338km)	A public right of way on foot, riding or leading a horse, or bicycle
Byways Open to All Traffic (BOAT)	16 miles (26km)	A public right of way on foot, riding or leading a horse, bicycle or in any road-legal vehicle driven by a legally entitled driver

Path Infrastructure

In order for the network to function there is a requirement to provide a range of infrastructure which allow the public to find their way (signposts), cross water courses (bridges and culverts) and allow the landowner to control animals and livestock (gates and stiles). The network has around 10,000 pieces of furniture and structures, including:

Structure Type	Quantity
Bridges	722
Culverts	495
Stiles	416
Gates	1583
Signposts	2106
Waymark posts	3983

Least Restrictive Access Policy

Rights of way provision for disabled people has to be considered equally with that of other visitors. The spirit of this policy is based on the principle of 'Least Restrictive Access' and requires that all structures erected on rights of way must meet the highest possible standards.

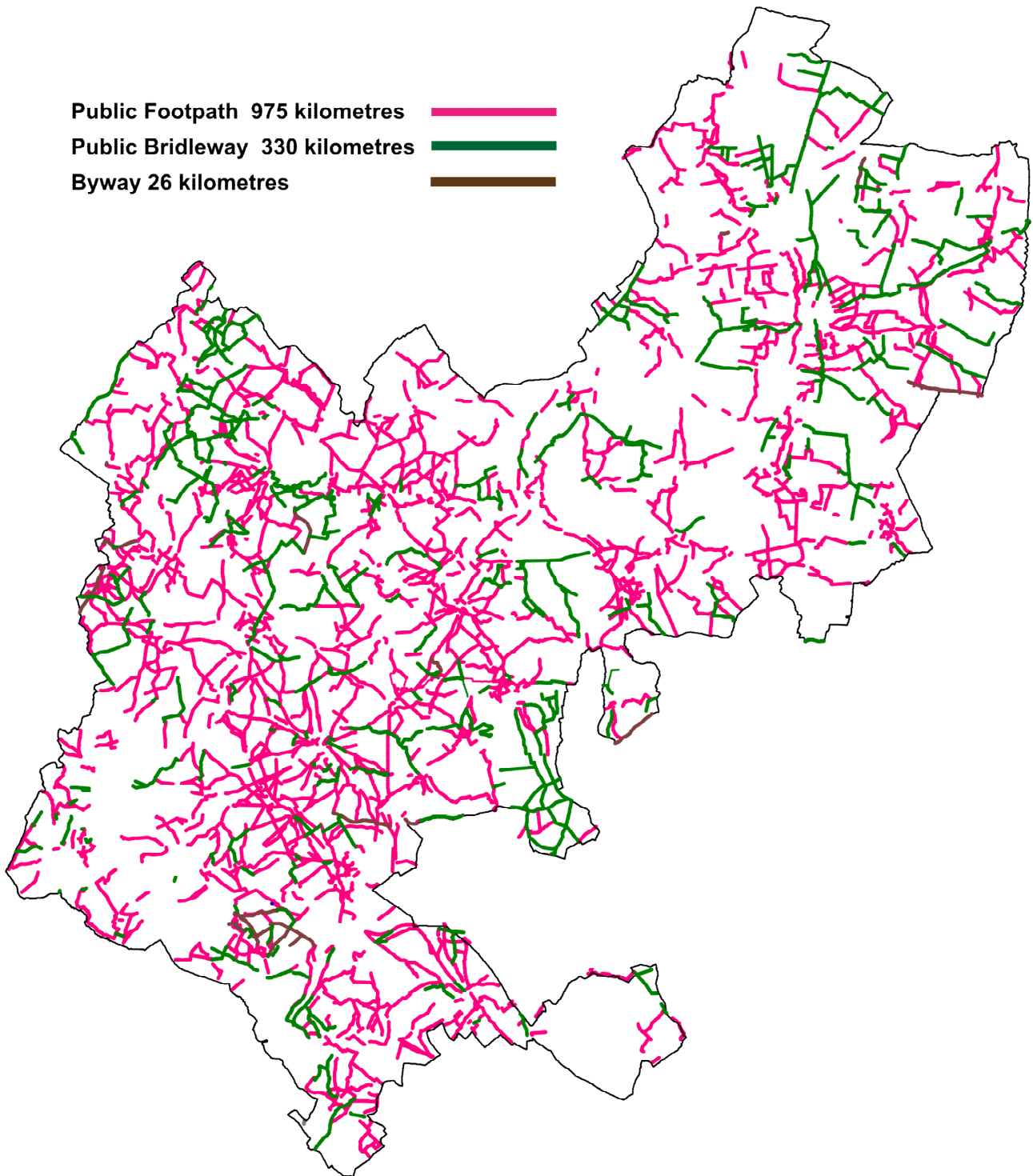
The principle of least restrictive access is that the improvements will benefit all users not only those with restricted mobility.

Country walking, cycling and riding is on the increase and the proportion of users with decreased mobility is also increasing. These users range from parents with pushchairs, who are keen to take their young children out into the countryside, to people who may have mobility related disabilities.

The selection of a gap, gate or stile which permits people to use a path crossing a field boundary such as a hedge or fence should result in as little restriction as possible for potential users including users of mobility vehicles whilst meeting the land management needs of the landowners.

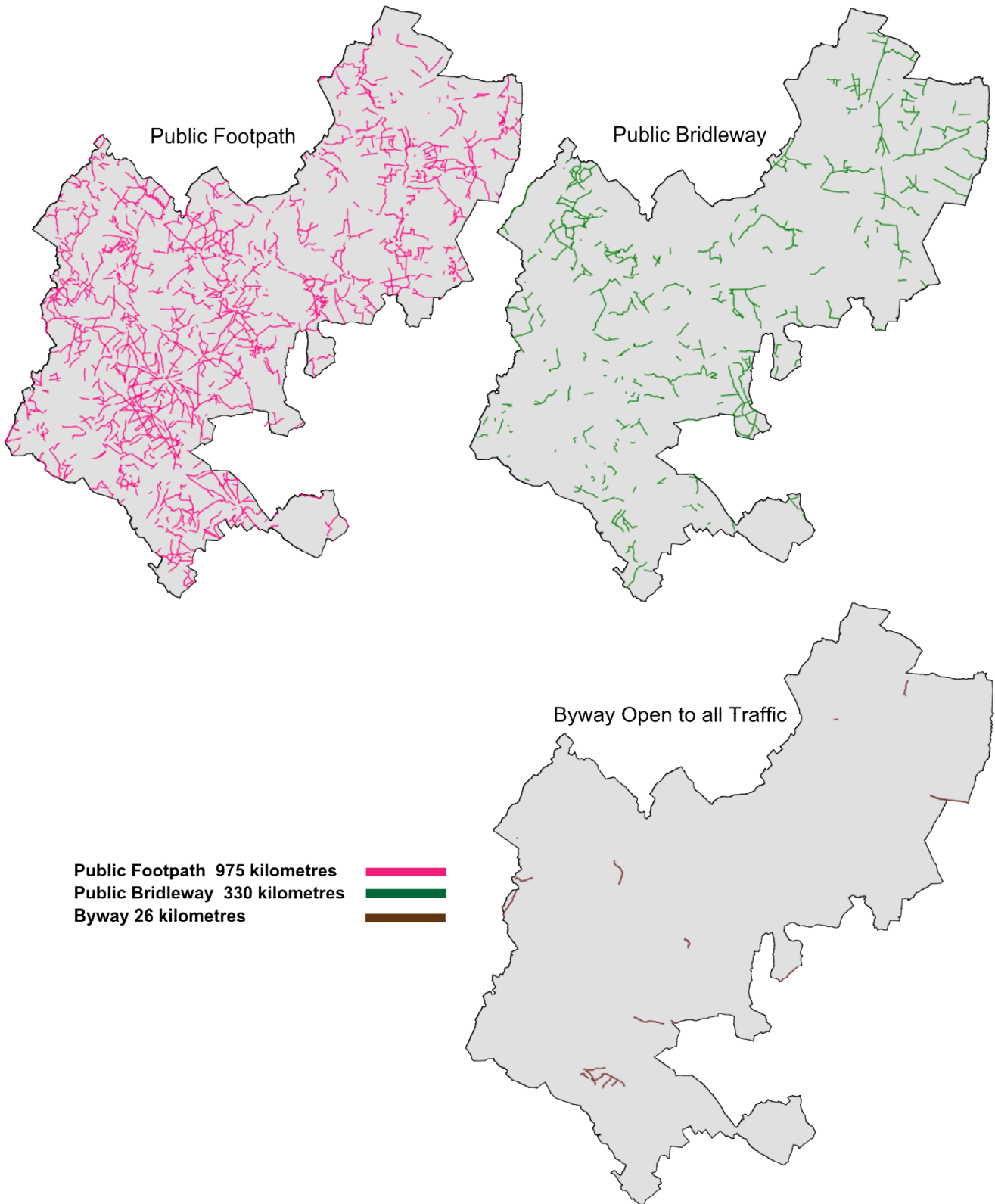
The policy covers all structures placed across public rights of way including those structures erected for livestock purposes, structures erected for safety reasons and all other structures that are a permanent or temporary barrier to full access along the right of way. This policy does not include bridges (and culverts) but does cover structures which are attached to bridges.

PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY NETWORK



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PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY



3.1.1 The Management of Public Rights of Way

Network Management

Public rights of way form part of the highway network. The council, as Highway Authority, has a statutory responsibility to assert and protect the rights of the public to use the public path network. Working closely with partners and landowners the council seeks to ensure that they are open and available for use at all times. The council makes improvements to the network and surveys and maintains infrastructure on the network to ensure the paths are accessible to all members of our community whilst taking into consideration land management and conservation principles.

The primary challenge facing rights of way management relates to the availability of resources and how the council manages those resources to prioritise the delivery and action plan. The OAIP will detail those areas of work that are required over the plan period and the action plan will provide further detail on how those elements will be assessed and prioritised in order to provide best value.

Surface Management

Maintaining path surfaces to an acceptable standard for legal users is generally the council's responsibility. An exception is when the surface is disturbed and planted as part of agricultural practice, i.e. ploughing and cropping, and in this case, farmers and landholders have a legal requirement to reinstate the path within a set period of time.

The council works closely with landowners to ensure that public rights of way are open and available for use at all times and, generally, the majority of landowners comply with their legal responsibilities. However, for those exceptional cases, an enforcement policy is in place to ensure the reinstatement. Notices may be served against a landowner and costs recovered as a final sanction.

An annual programme of vegetation clearance, of around a quarter of the network, is undertaken by specialised contractors, landowners and volunteers. The programme is built up by officer inspections and local requests. Most paths are cut twice during the May to September period but can be supplemented by clearance by trained People, Projects, Partnerships P3 volunteer groups, Community Payback scheme or other volunteer groups.

Paths where surface improvement or appropriate management can increase accessibility to the natural environment, especially for those with limited ability, are identified through local consultation.

Furniture and Structures

The responsibility for infrastructure on the network is divided between Central Bedfordshire Council and the landowner; in some cases, responsibility for structures is shared. Generally, where infrastructure is placed on or close to a route to assist users i.e. signage, waymarking, safety barriers, etc these are classified as ‘furniture’ and are the responsibility of the council. If something is put in place for a landowner’s benefit, i.e. to control animals or stock, then these are generally the landowner’s responsibility to maintain and are classed as ‘structures’ i.e. gates and stiles. The remainder of the structures on the network, which may be in place for safety and accessibility purposes, are the council’s responsibility to maintain. These include bridges, culverts, gates and barriers.

The council works with landowners to improve the accessibility of structures over their land, e.g. to replace a stile with a gate or a gap if stock control is no longer required. There are occasions where the structure falls below our set standards, through either wear and tear or poor original design, and as a last resort enforcement action may be required to resolve the issue.

Provision and maintenance of signposting from the main highway and off-road waymark posts and discs, collectively classed as furniture, are the responsibility of the council.

CASE STUDY – RIGHTS OF WAY ACCESSIBILITY



The council has had a targeted approach to removing unnecessary structures from the rights of way network; replacing stiles with more accessible structures.



The parish of Toddington had 65 Stiles and by working closely with local people and the farming community over 59 stiles have been removed from the network.

This ensures that the network around Toddington is more accessible to local people and a wider range of physical abilities.

Definitive Map and Statement

The council is responsible for the continuous review of the Definitive Map and Statement for Central Bedfordshire. The map and statement are the legal record of where public rights exist, defining the status, position and width of the rights of way. Three separate area based maps exist for Central Bedfordshire and there is a rolling three-year programme of consolidation and associated publication.

Definitive Map Anomalies

The growth of towns and villages, new roads and other changes to the landscape have meant that Central Bedfordshire has significantly changed since the Definitive Map was first produced in 1953. However, the historical, legal, rights of way network did not always keep up with the pace of change and some paths were not appropriately accommodated or diverted. As a result there are a number of paths which have been built on, obstructed by minerals workings or a host of other problems. These are classified as Definitive Map anomalies. There are around 370 Definitive Map anomalies, which affect around 18% of the network.

There are a number of challenges with regard to definitive map work, which have to be assessed and addressed over the coming years. These include processing applications for orders, the need to fulfil the council's statutory responsibilities and the proposed closure of the Definitive Map and Statement in 2026.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 provides for a cut-off date, of 1 January 2026, after which rights of way already in existence on 1 January 1949 and not shown on the definitive map and statement by 2026 will be extinguished. The council is required, therefore, to put in place a programme to deal with these unrecorded rights of ways and have them recorded on the Definitive Map and Statement as appropriate.

The urban centres of Biggleswade and Dunstable are currently excluded from our Definitive Map, due to the decision taken in the 1950s to opt out of the mapping process for those urban areas (as was the extent of the urban area in the early 1950's). Changes in legislation, however, have necessitated that these areas (which are now the urban centres) now be surveyed and any public rights of way found will need to be added by means of Definitive Map Modification Orders.

The OAIP, and more specifically the accompanying Action Plan will detail the steps and measures to be taken to complete the 2026 'cut off' and excluded area work.

Growth and Development

The population of Central Bedfordshire is increasing rapidly and is expected to reach 276,500 by 2016. The council will seek to manage this growth to reduce the impact that it has on public rights of way. What were once rural countryside paths have become subsumed within new urban environments and in a number of instances, this has resulted in poorly designed routes or paths that have been built upon, obstructed or fragmented - adding to the list of Definitive Map anomalies.

Future impact on rights of way by development should be minimised through the Development Strategy which states that the council will seek to ensure that the rights of way network is fully incorporated into any development and that improvements are sought to the connecting network.

The OAIP will define new ways of working to ensure that the council deals with historical development and growth issues and ensure that future growth and development creates sustainable communities and enhanced rights of way links and routes.

Requests for Service

As a front line and customer focused service, contact and communication with the residents of Central Bedfordshire is vital. The council's' Customer First initiative aims to offer a first class customer service experience that enables residents to interact with the council conveniently, simply and quickly. Using modern technology to allow residents to access key council services online and continuing to serve the public through traditional face to face and telephone channels, Central Bedfordshire Council will be there to serve its customers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

As well as general comments and feedback relating to rights of way, received through Customer First, the council receives over 700 user and local council requests for service per year. These requests range from information on walks through to reporting of a overgrown path or defective structure. Health and safety issues are dealt with as a priority along with requests that link to planned projects.

Public Rights of Way – Ease of Use

The Best Value Performance Indicator (no longer a national indicator) 'ease of use' surveys are still undertaken by most local authorities. The methodology entails two randomly generated 5% samples which are surveyed by the council in spring and autumn. Surveys cover the whole authority and Urban Fringe Area 1 (UF1) areas [a 1mile (1.5km) band around communities with populations over 3500].

Central Bedfordshire has an average figure of 70.6% 'ease of use' for the whole network and 69.8% for UF1 Areas for the last 3 years. Results are used to identify current issues with the network and shape resource distribution. There are a number of factors, which mean a path may fail the survey including ploughing and cropping obstructions, defective structures or overgrown paths. The numbers of Definitive Map anomalies that have not been resolved are a constant in keeping figures down and a pattern is emerging to show that smaller UF1 samples are affected by the season, but no other clear pattern can be determined.

Year	Main Survey	UF1 Survey
2010	67.2	66.9
2011	72.3	66.1
2012	72.4	76.5

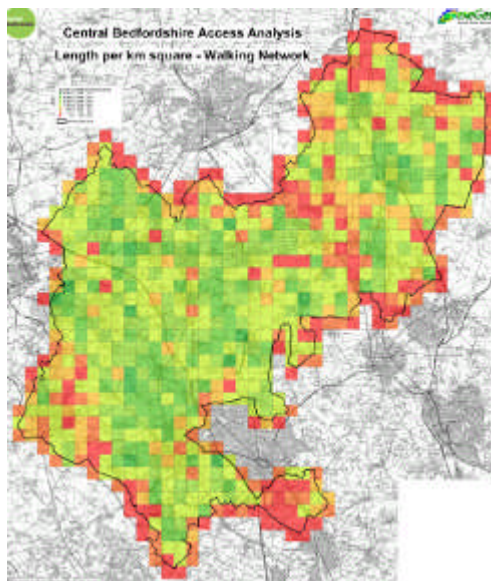
Statutory and Legal Responsibilities

The relevant legislation and associated duties are summarised here:

Legislation	Duty
Highways Act 1980	<p>Maintain rights of way in a safe condition for use by the public and ensure that paths remain free of obstructions.</p> <p>Ensure that paths are signposted where they leave a metalled highway and are easy to follow.</p> <p>Powers to create a footpath, bridleway or restricted byway</p> <p>Survey new footpath, bridleway or restricted byway</p> <p>Carry out specified works to footpath, bridleway or restricted byway so fit for purpose</p> <p>Have regard to agriculture, forestry and nature conservation when carrying out public path functions</p> <p>Provide opportunities to divert, create or extinguish rights of way.</p>
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	<p>Keep the Definitive Map and Statement up to date and available for public inspection.</p> <p>Manage species and habitats in accordance with legislative duties</p>
Town and Country Planning Act 1990	<p>Modify rights of way network to accommodate planned development</p>
Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000	<p>Prepare and publish Rights of Way Improvement Plans. Establish an appointed Local Access Forum (LAF) to advise on improvements of public access to land for open air recreation and enjoyment</p> <p>Have detailed provisions concerning the establishment, membership and administration of LAF</p> <p>Record, protect and maintain the public rights of way network</p>
Crime and Disorder Act 1998	<p>Do all that we reasonably can to reduce crime and disorder across all council functions</p>

Connectivity

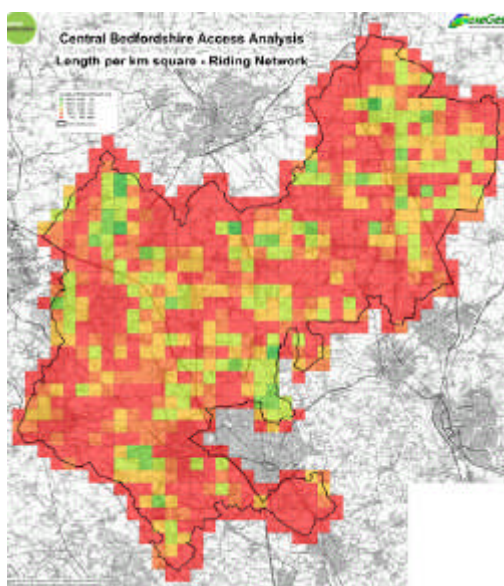
During 2009, exeGesIS SDM Ltd were commissioned to assess the density, connectivity and distribution of public path provision across Central Bedfordshire and to determine the accessibility of the network from each settlement for all legal users of the network. The maps below show the some of the results of this analysis. Green 0.6 mile (1km) squares indicate areas of good connectivity and red squares indicate areas of poor connectivity. As no PROW data was available for neighbouring authority areas, the Central Bedfordshire boundary is mostly red although reasonable connectivity may exist in these areas.



Network Available to Walkers

This has shown that the network available to walkers is generally good with significant lengths of interconnected ROW available around a number of key settlements including Biggleswade, Dunstable, Houghton Regis, Toddington, Ampthill and Barton-Le-Clay.

However, there are also some significant areas of deficit for walkers within Central Bedfordshire which include the north-south corridor from Sandy, through Haynes to Shefford and onto Shillington, around Leighton Buzzard and Hyde.



Network Available to Horse Riders and Off Road Cyclists

In contrast, the network available to riders, is generally poor. Some settlements have reasonably interconnected routes available for riders, which include Biggleswade, Cranfield, Dunstable, Barton-Le-Clay, Totternhoe, Silsoe and Sandy.

However, these are overshadowed by the areas of deficit, which include Woburn, , Maulden, Clophill, Shefford, Henlow, Arlesey and the area around Leighton Buzzard.

The OAIP identifies bridleway connectivity as a key area of work and has included it as a Flagship Project.

CAMS Database

CAMS (Countryside Access Management System) is a database application used by the council to manage the maintenance of the Rights of Way network in Central Bedfordshire.

CAMS is used to record and locate problems and requests for service received by mail, email or telephone. These issues are tied to subsequent actions including correspondence, enforcement and necessary practical works. It allows the council to closely manage and record progress of works or issues.

Cycletracks, Permissive Paths and Other Access Routes

Public rights of way are the primary method for people to access the countryside and wider landscape; however, there are other routes which do not form part of the public rights of way network.

There is a network of cycletracks in central Bedfordshire that form local routes and are part of the Sustrans National Cycle Network (NCN). These routes, which often link with public rights of way and with the bridleway and byway network, are a valuable resource that enable cyclists to travel around the area for recreation and commuting purposes.

Central Bedfordshire is a county conducive to cycling. Many towns have services within easy reach on foot or by bike, whilst the National Cycle Network (NCN) Routes 6, 12 and 51 traverse the area providing links to neighbouring towns. The varied topography with flats and hills and wide range of landscapes, lends itself to high quality, road cycling and cycle tourism.

Building on the NCN, a comprehensive network of pedestrian and cycling routes are being developed to cater for commuting trips, enable access to services and to serve as leisure routes in their own right. Investment in providing and signing cycle tracks, lanes and parking is designed to encourage greater take up of cycling as a realistic alternative to the many current car journeys that involve round trips of less than 10 miles (16km).

Legally Creating Access for Cyclists

The legislation relating to creating access for cyclists has not kept up to speed with the need to promote sustainable transport; this can hamper attempts to create more cycletracks or adapt the rights of way network for cycle use. There is recognition that cycletracks and cycleways should have a formal legal status, possibly as a bridleway, by means of a cycletrack order or through a permissive agreement or license.

Permissive Paths

Even with the existing network of Rights of Way sometimes an extra link can make a considerable difference to connectivity. Often it is not possible to achieve this by providing or creating a public right of way so a permissive path can be a viable alternative. This allows a landowner to provide a route whilst still maintaining control over the route ever acquiring permanent public rights.

Most Permissive Path schemes involve a formal, legal, agreement between the council and the landowner which details the length of time for which the path is to be provided, when and under what circumstances the path may be closed and ultimately outlines the steps required by either party to terminate the agreement. In most cases the council takes on the responsibility for maintenance of the route, however, there are some routes, which are provided on a permissive basis where the landowner is still required to maintain the route. This is often the case where permissive routes are being provided as part of a 'development' and the developer/landowner is unwilling to provide a public right of way.

Other Permissive Path Routes

There are other schemes for providing permissive access where the council are not responsible for maintenance and these included access schemes stemming from farm grant schemes and access granted by such bodies as the National Trust and the Canal and Rivers Trust (formerly British Waterways).

The permissive and licensed access routes can form key links to public rights of way and form an integral part of the 'Connecting Spaces' network.

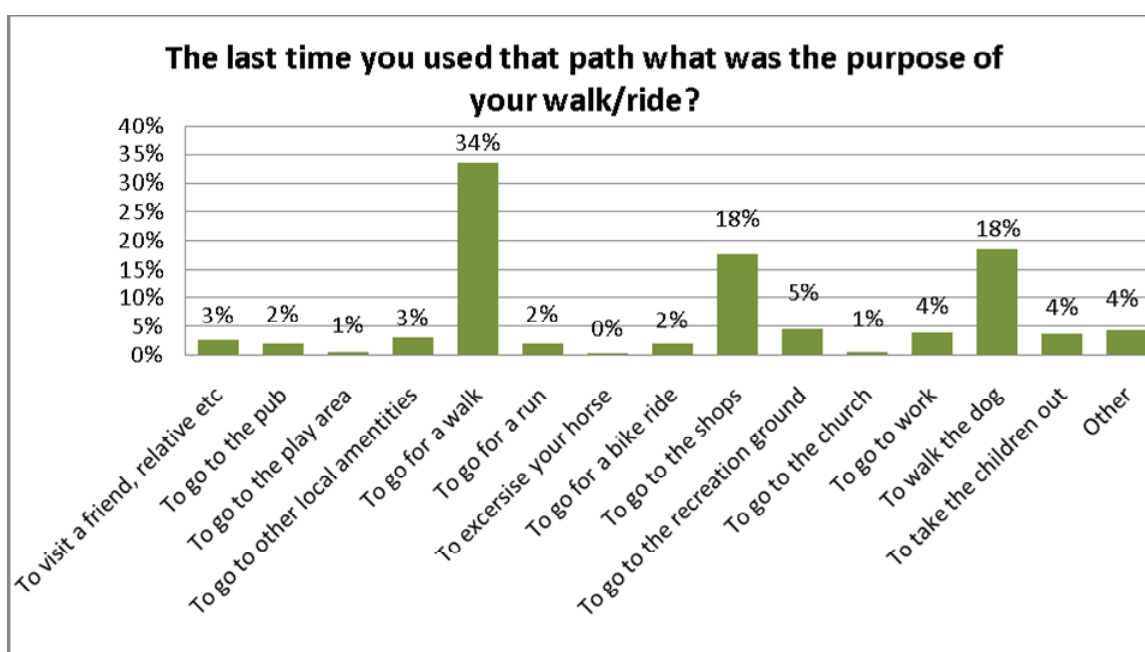
Users may not always differentiate between public rights of way and other means of access. The council will, therefore, continue to explore the full range of access creation tools available and work with other bodies to facilitate access by means of creating public rights of way, cycle routes, permissive paths and other access agreements.

3.2 How are Connecting Spaces used?

It is clear that public rights of way are well used by Central Bedfordshire residents. In 2010 a Rights of Way (ROW) User Survey was carried out to gather information about how people used public rights of way based on a random sample of residents using a mix of telephone interviews and field interviews.

It was found that 82% of respondents had made use of rights of way at some time.

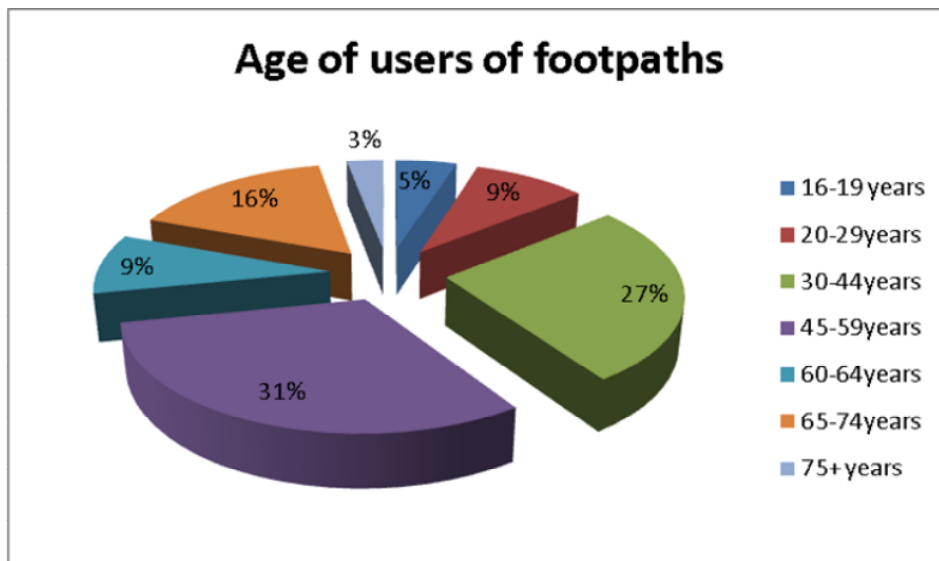
Walking the dog or going for a walk were the most commonly mentioned activities along the rights of way, however going to the shops was popular too, by respondents to the telephone survey.



Source: 2010 Telephone Survey

The survey showed that slightly more males were users of rights of way than females, and so non-users were more likely to be females than males.

86% of users interviewed along the rights of way were aged over 30 years and the majority of these were mature adults aged up to 59 years.



Source: 2010 Telephone Survey

Disability was a limitation to the use of the network for 19% of the population who in the telephone survey reported some kind of illness or disability; however 8% of those interviewed on the rights of way were disabled, showing that disability does not preclude participation for some.

Other key facts regarding network usage include:

- 82% of respondents interviewed along the rights of way visited the footpaths daily or more than once a week, with female users being slightly more inclined to use daily than males
- 88% of ROW users regularly walked or travelled up to 4 miles (6.4km) on their route, however a higher proportion of males were inclined to walk further than this compared to their female counterparts.
- 89% used local rights of way, but just under 59% of telephone respondents surveyed went further afield.
- 97.5% of respondents in both surveys were 'white British', and of the 2.5% non-white respondents, Asian British was the largest group.

3.2.1 Reasons for non-use

Those who did not routinely use the rights of way did so for a variety of reasons of which disability or ill health was the most significant factor preventing use or greater use of the network.

The other, non health or disability, related factors which deterred or discouraged use of the public rights of way network were issues such as the level of dog mess, muddy paths and overgrown paths.

3.2.2 Satisfaction with rights of way

Overall 83% of respondents interviewed along the pathways reported a good overall experience with the routes. The majority also felt that paths were generally free from obstructions, that undergrowth was under control and that accessibility was average for the disabled.

3.3 The Importance of Connecting Spaces

Connecting spaces are not just linear routes from A to B; they form part of the fabric of the countryside and are seen by communities as part of the community resource. The legislative and maintenance responsibilities guide the council's work, however, research and survey questionnaires also demonstrate that our work should also reflect the needs and aspirations of our communities.

3.3.1 Connecting Spaces... as Local Spaces

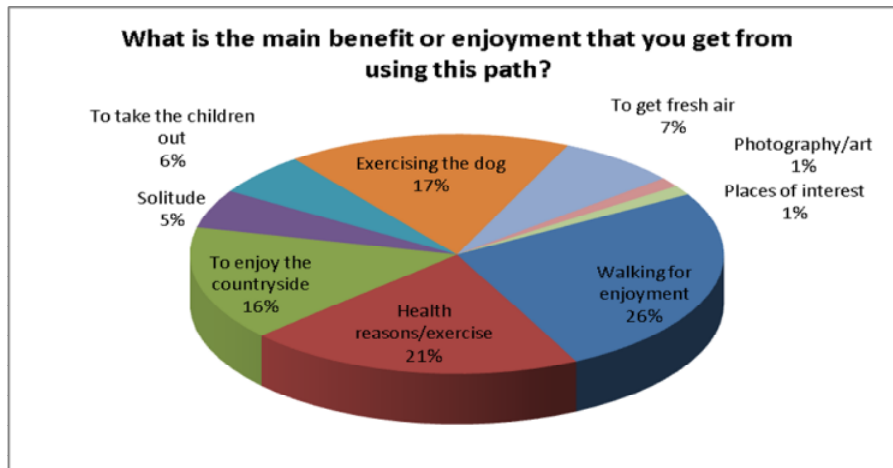
ROW User Survey data shows that Public Rights of Way are an important part of local life; facilitating access to local amenities, playgrounds, shops, work and the pub. The council recognises the value that local people put on their local routes and works hard to ensure they are local spaces, with tangible community involvement and ownership.

Communities are regularly consulted with regard to new development and Master Planning and are encouraged to get involved with the management of access through the Joint Local Access Forum and the Local Cycle Forums.

Section 5 - '*Local Spaces*' provides greater detail about local community participation and engagement across all green space and Rights of Way assets.

3.3.2 Connecting Spaces... as Healthy Spaces

The ROW User Survey shows that 38% of users used public rights of way for exercise purposes (walking, running, horse riding and cycling) but when specific path users were questioned about their motivation for using it 47% declared that they were using it for health reasons or for the love of walking.



The council are working to maximise the use of Rights of Way as healthy spaces through the promotion and management of health walks across Central Bedfordshire. In 2011, 343 walks were held with an average of 20.5 people attending each walk, with 7016 people benefitting over the course of the year.

The council will work to promote its' high quality walking, cycling and horse-riding routes which are in areas of interest or are convenient to recreational and sports users.

3.3.3 Connecting Spaces... as Economic Spaces

It is estimated that over 527 million walking trips are made annually in England and a recent report has valued spending associated with walking at over £6.14 billion.¹⁸ Little research has been undertaken into the economic impact of countryside recreation more generally but given the estimated spending attributed to walking trips alone, the impact on the rural economy in England is likely to be substantial.

¹⁸ The economic and social value of walking in England

The ROW User Survey shows that 31% of users used public rights of way to access local amenities, go to work or to get to other destinations, which were likely to generate user spending (e.g. shops or children's outings). Schemes which promote and encouraging walking such as the annual Bedfordshire Ramblers Walking Festival and the Walkers are Welcome scheme are seeking to encourage wider engagement from residents and are marketed regionally and nationally increasing tourism interest in the area.

Public rights of way are a key part of the transport and travel infrastructure within Central Bedfordshire; this importance is reflected within a number of local strategies and priorities. They are also a key component of the cultural and recreational resource.

The Development Strategy highlights that the public rights of way network offers people access to enjoy Central Bedfordshire's countryside and heritage to the benefit of their quality of life and health. It stresses that the network forms a practical part of the council's overall transport infrastructure providing valuable access on foot and often by cycle, to the wider countryside, shops and other local amenities.¹⁹

¹⁹ Draft Development Strategy

3.3.4 Connecting Spaces as... Artistic Spaces

The Central Bedfordshire Council Public Art Framework²⁰ highlights that public art can have numerous benefits for communities including:

- Creating 'added value' for a whole development, signifying a distinctive, unique and high-quality approach to the public realm
- Improving the business environment and the public realm, attracting further investment to the area, raising profile, increasing footfall
- Offering local communities an opportunity for engagement
- Creating valuable links and associations with other local areas through a 'cultural offer' that attracts business and visitors

The Framework suggests that routes and trails for walking and cycling are a key priority for Central Bedfordshire public art, with artists playing a key role in providing serial artworks or waymarkers, or the design of signage, furniture, seating, and other public realm elements. These will reflect, reinforce and help to develop local distinctiveness.

3.3.5 Connecting Spaces as...Wildlife Spaces

The council is committed to the continued survival of biodiversity and species along Central Bedfordshire's rights of way and supports the concept of rights of way being corridors for wildlife. The Rights of Way Team, as part of their duty to maintain and keep clear Rights of Way, ensures that the ecological impact of works is fully understood, mitigation in place and that works meet all legislative requirements and established standards.

²⁰ Central Bedfordshire Council Art In The Public Realm - A Delivery Framework, Modus Operandi Art Consultants, August 2012

3.4 Connecting Spaces: The Next 10 Years

Structures

There will be an annual programme of surveying which will identify structures to be repaired and replaced, with health and safety issues being a priority to address. Landowners will be contacted where necessary. Local distinctiveness and landscape setting as well as *Least Restrictive* standards will be considered when specifications are drawn up for all work programmes.

Major Bridges

Major bridges along the public path network will continue to be inspected by bridge engineers on an established four year cycle [30 locations per year] with problems addressed in order of priority but within 18 months of identification.

Signposting

The annual programme of signpost replacement will continue, including a proportion that will have distance and destination details to encourage both new and existing users into the wider network.

Waymarking

Further waymarking of routes; this is critical in encouraging confidence in the user and when carried out with the agreement of the landowner it is found to assist them in their farming operations as well as guide users. Although annual programmes exist, a good proportion of new and replacement works are carried out by P3 volunteers and Friends groups.

Database

The database is deficient in terms of trees and other potential items of risk within, across or adjacent to the rights of way network. Assessment procedures will be produced to enable inspection of the whole network over the period of the plan to build up a full picture.

Connectivity

Look to work closely with the relevant user groups and local council's to firm up priorities. See as an opportunity to resolve a number of the existing definitive map anomalies.

Definitive Map

This area of work has suffered a reduction in resources in recent years and the council will look to ensure it provides the appropriate level of service. The council is required to fulfil its duties to process modification orders, public path orders, Town and Country Planning Act orders, work on the Excluded Areas and work towards the 2026 'cut off' date.

Definitive Statement

The council will work to ensure that the definitive statements are as accurate as possible and reflect the current, legal, situation on the ground. The council will continue to ensure that any new orders that are made include accurate and informative schedules.

Excluded Areas

Two of the maps have Excluded Areas [in Biggleswade and Dunstable] where no public rights of way are shown. The process of producing Definitive Maps for these areas has started with a Strategy and Methodology now in place. The intention would be over the next 2 years to push through adding the non contentious paths uncovered during research and consultation, revisiting the contentious claimed routes at a later date.

The work of adding paths to the Definitive Map will be done in two phases: Phase 1 will target those routes that are currently usable or could easily be opened up for public use; Phase 2 will address those paths obstructed by development or which are considered unneeded/unnecessary. The timescales for making legal orders for Phases 1 and 2 are 2013 and 2016 respectively. Once any orders are made, they will be subject to public scrutiny and objection, which could result in public inquiries and delay the implementation of any orders for a further 18 months or even result in paths remaining unrecorded.

Applications and Orders

Changes to the Map and Statement take a variety of forms under different legislation, particularly the Wildlife and Countryside, Highways, and Town and Country Planning Acts. The timeframe in the legislation means that modification applications should take precedence and are the priority of the Definitive Map Officer. Tighter deadlines for applications and orders tied to development mean they are the priority in the workload of area officers.

The applications policy has been comprehensively revised to help users and landowners understand the order making process with an associated leaflet for developers.

The economic situation, particularly in relation to house building, will always have an influence on the number of Town and Country Planning Act applications that the council receive. If there is a large upturn in the house building market – this will result in an increased pressure on the processing of orders. There are proposals (as of time of writing) to streamline the processing of these applications to allow the application to be processed at the time when the authority is considering the planning application.

Anomalies

Anomalies take a number of forms and are often longstanding. Many date back to when the predecessor authorities drew up the original path maps such as routes with no connections or different status in bordering parishes. At the time of writing there are just under 400 map anomalies in Central Bedfordshire, which are prioritised and in the process of been resolved.

Legal recording of access routes

A number of access routes that are part of the connecting spaces network do not currently have the appropriate legal status for the type of use envisaged. Where a route uses a public footpath but is identified for future use by cyclists, the consent of the landowner for a permissive route or a legal order to change the status of the path i.e. from footpath to bridleway or footpath to cycletrack will be required. In other locations, new routes have been identified which will require the creation of a footpath, bridleway or cycletrack, as appropriate. The council will seek to ensure that the appropriate legal process is carried out in parallel with any physical construction works.

3.5 Action Plan Summary for Connecting Spaces

The main *Aims* and *Outcomes* of the Action Plan for Connecting Spaces are detailed below. The specific projects relating to these aims are laid out in detail in the Action Plan which will be reviewed and updated every 5 years.

Aim 1 - A Well Maintained Network

Outcome - Rights of Way to be available and unobstructed

Outcome - Rights of Way to be signed from the Road and waymarked as necessary

Aim 2 - A Better Defined and Recorded Network

Outcome - All Public Rights of Way to be legally recorded by 2026

Outcome - Definitive Maps are created for the Excluded areas of Biggleswade and Dunstable

Aim 3 - A Well Connected Network

Outcome - Connectivity of the whole public path network is increased

Outcome - Bridleway Connectivity is increased

Outcome – Further severance of the network is minimised

Aim 4 - A More Accessible Network

Outcome - Public Rights of Way will be more accessible to users

3.6 Policies for Connecting Spaces

The policies for Connecting Spaces will support the delivery plan but also ensure that the council, its partners and the wider community deliver outdoor and countryside access in line with agreed principles:

OAIP - Policy Statement 1 – Surface Management

The council will, where appropriate, seek opportunities to surface, manage and promote paths that increase accessibility for all local people in conjunction with local communities.

The council will work with local communities to prioritise paths that require surface vegetation clearance and that clearance is appropriate for the level of annual growth.

The council will ensure its enforcement policy is followed to ensure that all paths affected by farming operations are reinstated within the legal timeframe including action by the council and subsequent recovery of costs.

OAIP - Policy Statement 2 – Signposts and way-makers

The council will signpost all required points of access from the main highway, using distance, destination and path identification as necessary.

The council will work with land managers, local and user groups to erect waymark posts where required to assist all parties.

OAIP - Policy Statement 3 – Bridges and culverts

The council will seek to ensure that major new structures on the network are appropriate for the location, as accessible as possible and do not limit future access improvements to the adjacent network.

OAIP - Policy Statement 4 – Accessibility of Structures

The council will make the network more accessible by negotiating the removal of redundant structures and replacing stiles with gaps or gates where stock control is still needed. The council will ensure that any new structures installed meet the requirements of the Least Restrictive Access policy

OAIP - Policy Statement 5 – Network Ease of Use

The council will look to increase Ease of Use statistics, year on year, through resolving map anomalies and targeting other failure areas, whilst working within existing constraints.

Breathing Spaces: Sites and Greenspaces

...oases at the heart of your community



4 Breathing Spaces: Sites and Greenspace

...oases at the heart of your community

High-quality, accessible green spaces are highly valued by the public. In addition to their intrinsic value, they provide considerable benefits to quality of life, health and wellbeing. People's needs have changed, and more provision of accessible green space and high-quality landscapes closer to where they live are needed to enable them to build more outdoor recreation into busy, modern lifestyles.

(DEFRA 2010)

4.1 What are Breathing Spaces?

Breathing spaces are areas of countryside and green spaces accessible to the public. There are over 2000 hectares (4938 acres) of greenspace in Central Bedfordshire managed or designated as country parks, woodlands, nature reserves, commons or village greens. Over half of these sites (1091 hectares, 2694 acres) are owned or managed by Central Bedfordshire Council.

The remaining green space is owned and managed by a wide range of public bodies, Trusts and Town and Parish Council's. This mosaic of accessible green space forms part of the rich and unique landscape of Central Bedfordshire and it is a key priority of the council to ensure the countryside is preserved and enhanced and that high quality access is maintained.

Within the scope of this plan we are only looking at the management and development of Central Bedfordshire Council owned sites, wider documents such as the Central Bedfordshire Green Infrastructure Plan and the Leisure Strategy will establish quality and quantity standards and put in context the opportunities that can be gained for nature conservation and habitat management from creating multi functional sites as well as networks and corridors of interlinked sites.

4.1.1 Countryside Sites in Council Ownership or Management

There are 58 sites owned or managed by the council including ‘strategic’ country parks such as Dunstable Downs and Rushmere Country Park; heritage sites such as Clophill Church, Segenhoe Church, Someries Castle and Swiss Garden, which is leased from the Shuttleworth Trust; large woodlands such as Marston Thrift and Linslade Wood; riverbanks; chalk grassland hills and community greenspaces.

Sites range in size and offer varying facilities for visitors but the vast majority of the sites are accessible to the public.

20 Largest Central Bedfordshire Council Owned / Leased / Managed Sites (hectares)

Aspley Woods	329.4	Smithcombe Hills	18.0
Rushmere Country Park	162 ²¹	Houghton Hall Park	17.2
Kings Wood (Heath and Reach)	124.9 ²²	Campton Wood	15.5
Marston Thrift	56.2	Flitwick Wood	14.4
Dunstable Downs	51.9	Cottage Bottom Field	14.1
Sundon Hills Country Park	46.2	Totternhoe Knolls	14.1
Kings Wood and Glebe Meadows	42.5	Centenary Wood	13.6
Linslade Wood	35.4	Tiddenfoot Waterside Park	13.2
Studham Common	24.6	Whipsnade Heath	11.6
Henlow Common and Langford Meadows	18.5	Baulk Wood	9.0

The council works very closely with communities and partners. A number of sites are managed by local Trusts and Friends groups through Service Level Agreements, Management Agreements and Lease Agreements. Rushmere Country Park, for example, is managed by the Greensand Trust. Dunstable Downs and a further 7 sites are managed by the National Trust.

²¹ Jointly owned and managed with the Greensand Trust

²² Part owned by Central Bedfordshire Council

Countryside Sites Categorisation

The council's countryside sites are currently being categorised into 4 'levels'. Following the methodology based on the council's Green Infrastructure Plan, categories are based on size, primary usage and location to the public. These levels will focus different levels of development within the action plan.

Levels are:

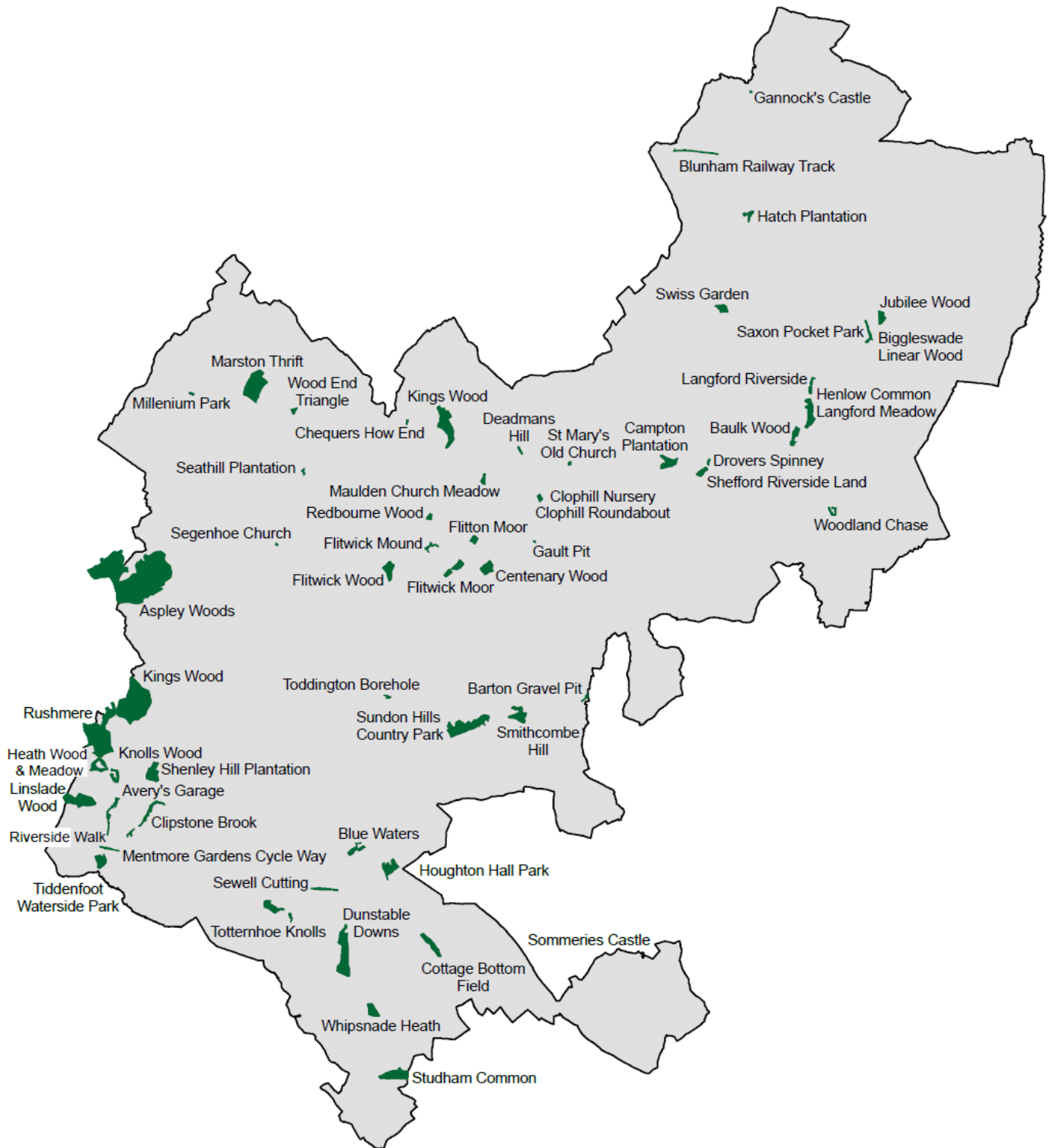
1. 'Strategic' - sites over 60ha with, or aspiring to have, 'Country Park' status possibly offering a range of facilities and attracting people from a wide catchment area
2. 'Middle' – sites over 20ha - Sites which attract people from outside the immediate neighbourhood and provide car parking and other facilities.
3. 'Neighbourhood' – sites over 2ha - Smaller facilities that tend to attract all their users from a single neighbourhood. Many users will walk to the site and they have limited facilities.
4. 'Other' - sites which may be small with little or no public access.

Categorisations may change and will be informed by the emerging Leisure Strategy which will set typologies for the range of open and green spaces in Central Bedfordshire. The categories will help to identify areas with a shortfall of greenspace against ANGST. Both ANGST and The Green Infrastructure Plan both currently show deficits in both local sites (less than 2ha) and Sub regional sites (more than 500ha).

Rushmere Country Park is an example of imaginative partnership working with the aim of delivering and managing new, strategic, countryside sites. The combined Rushmere Estate is governed by a partnership of The Greensand Trust and Central Bedfordshire Council. The partners have created a legal 50 year Joint Venture Agreement to combine, develop and conserve the total Estate (including the former Stockgrove Country Park) with the entire site operated and managed by the Greensand Trust, on a 'not - for - profit' basis in line with agreed objectives.

The overall vision is to create an attractive and accessible public open space, zoned in a manner that enables a wide range of leisure and countryside activities, whilst protecting and enhancing sensitive natural and historic environment areas and features and making the most of this unique landscape.

COUNTRYSIDE SITES



Crown copyright and database rights, 2013. Ordnance Survey 100049029. Central Bedfordshire Council

4.1.2 Open Access Areas

The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000²³ provided public access to 14 Open Access areas in Central Bedfordshire, covering a combined area of 410 ha. The majority of sites are designated for their chalk downland and fall within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Boundary (AONB). However, The Firs in Ampthill, falls outside the AONB, and is designated because of its important heathland habitat.



Furthermore, all land owned by the Forestry Commission has also been dedicated as Open Access Areas, including Maulden Wood and Chicksand Wood.

Central Bedfordshire Council is the relevant authority to enable and manage open access. The Act provides Central Bedfordshire Council with the authority to make bylaws, appoint wardens, erect and maintain notices and improve means of access.

4.1.3 Commons and Village Greens

Many of Central Bedfordshire's open spaces and countryside sites are formally registered (either wholly or in part) as common land or as village greens.

Central Bedfordshire Council is a registration authority under the Commons Registration Act 1965 and responsible for holding and maintaining a register of Common Land and a register of Town or Village Greens; statutory documents that provide a record of registered units of common land and village greens across the authority. Registers must be open for inspection by the public at all reasonable times.

There are 41 units of common land and 30 units of town or village greens in Central Bedfordshire. The majority of greens are owned and managed by the Town or Parish Council's, whereas, the majority of the Common Land units are in private ownership, which have rights of common registered in the statutory document. However, Central Bedfordshire Council owns, Dunstable Downs, Totterhoe Knolls, Henlow Common and Studham Common. The council also has ownership of part of Whipsnade Heath with a claim outstanding to the Land Registry for the remaining area. Whipsnade Green is owned by the Zoological Society of London and is included in a management scheme, for recreation, operated by Central Bedfordshire Council.

²³ Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/37/contents

Dunstable Downs, Totternhoe Knolls & Whipsnade heath are also designated in the Inclosure Award as Regulated Pasture²⁴ which enables them to be available for recreational purposes.

Biggleswade Common, at 118 ha, is the largest common in the area and accounts for over 25% (by area) of all common land in Central Bedfordshire. Biggleswade Common is in private ownership and management.

²⁴ Regulated Pasture is a form of common land that was often legally created, and rights enshrined, in an Inclosure Award.

4.1.4 Other Accessible Greenspace

There are many countryside sites and green spaces that are owned and managed by other organisations, such as Charitable Trusts (e.g. The Marston Vale Trust, The Wildlife Trust, The Greensand Trust, The Shuttleworth Trust) and Town and Parish Council's. The largest of which are the Millennium Country Park – Marston Moretaine (The Marston Vale Trust), The Lodge Nature Reserve – Sandy (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) and Maulden Woods (Forestry Commission).

There are also privately owned sites and estates that allow access to their land whether this is on a permit or permanent basis.

4.1.5 Green Infrastructure

Green Infrastructure (GI) is the strategically planned and delivered network of high quality green spaces aiming to deliver a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities. Council countryside sites are a key part of GI provision for the area but the network also includes green space in the wider sense and includes parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands, allotments and private gardens.

The council works to achieve appropriate access to GI in all new developments through the use of development strategy policies and the GI Design Guide²⁵; ensuring that landscape, biodiversity, historic environment and access aspirations are considered alongside plans for housing, transport, employment and economic growth. The Leisure Strategy provides further evidence for the need for new GI as a part of new development.

²⁵ <http://bedsandlutongreeninfrastructure.org/pdfs/MKSM-GI-by-Design-Guide.pdf>

4.1.6 Greenspace and Access Masterplanning

Greenspace masterplanning aims to produce a co-ordinated and integrated action plan to improve, enhance and manage targeted areas and networks and seek to make it more accessible to the general public.

These masterplans do, inevitably, include elements relating to GI, however, the primary purpose of these documents is to enhance the quality of public access and the greenspace experience. The masterplans will also seek to enhance landscape, the historic environment and biodiversity where possible.

The Masterplans may include land outside the ownership or control of the council to encourage 'inclusive' and common management, this can only be achieved with engagement with landowners and land managers and will be subject to a consultation process with all landowners.

4.1.7 The Historic Environment

Many of the council's' countryside sites contain a range of archaeological and historic landscape features (heritage assets) dating from the prehistoric to post-medieval periods and include earthworks, ruined structures and buried archaeological remains.

Ten sites are designated as Scheduled Monuments under the 1979 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act. This means that they are nationally important archaeological monuments and are afforded the highest level of protection, any works affecting these monuments or their setting require Scheduled Monument Consent from English Heritage. Some of the ruined structures are also Listed Buildings. Some of the countryside sites are known to contain non-designated archaeological and historic landscape sites and features. Some of these may also be of national importance but have not yet been subject to the formal designation process.

These sites give the council an excellent opportunity to interpret the historic environment, to bring it alive for communities and visitors and to put them in context to the surrounding environment.

There is also a high probability that many of the sites contain archaeological sites or features that have not yet been identified.

The framework for managing historic environment features is the *Conservation Principles: Policies and Guidance* (English Heritage 2008)²⁶ which promotes the management of the historic environment.

CASE STUDY – SWISS GARDEN RESTORATION



The council has a long-term lease on the Swiss Garden at Shuttleworth in Old Warden. In 2012 the council and the Shuttleworth Trust were awarded a grant of £2.8 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund to conserve listed structures, restore the landscape, improve hydrology and develop improved visitor facilities.

In addition to the obvious significance and beauty of this valuable historic garden, this site is one of Central Bedfordshire's most significant tourist attractions and deserves to be restored to its former glory.

4.1.8 Biodiversity

Of the 58 countryside sites that Central Bedfordshire Council manage, 11 of these are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and 14 carry the county level status of County Wildlife Site (CWS).

The Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act) requires a local authority to “take reasonable steps, consistent with the proper exercise of the authority's functions, to further the conservation and enhancement of the flora, fauna or geological or physiographical features by reason of which the site is of special scientific interest”. The council works with a variety of partners to effectively manage and maintain biodiversity on greenspaces and follows established management principles when carrying out habitat management. It seeks additional ecological advice, where necessary, particularly when managing sites with high biodiversity value. It also looks to provide managed access, interpretation and education to increase understanding and awareness of nature.

²⁶ Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance: for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment, English Heritage 2008

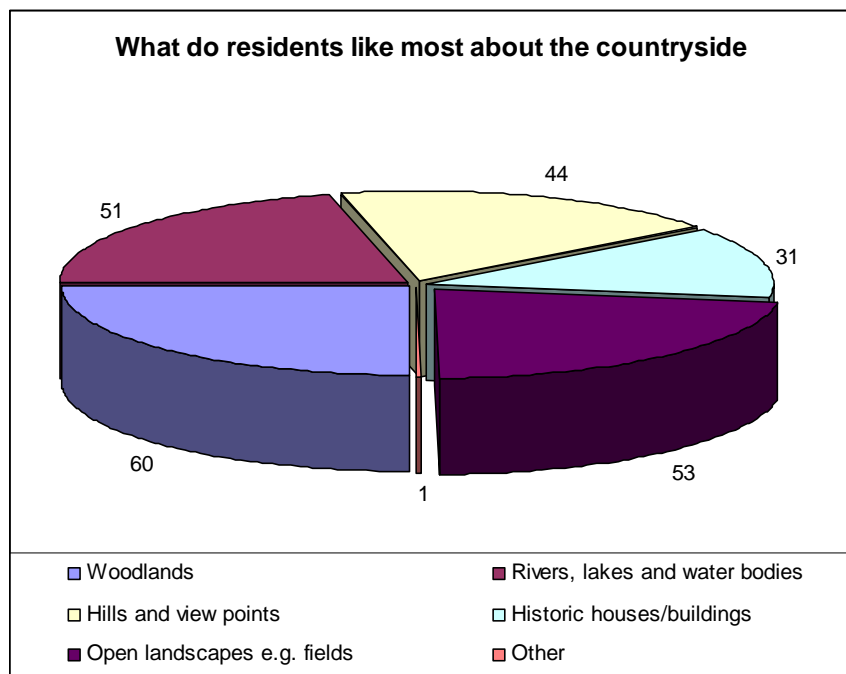
The council also provides advice to land owners and local groups regarding farm biological conservation activities and woodland management, with guidance and sign posting to relevant organisations, legislation and routes for funding these activities.

4.2 How are Breathing Spaces Used?

The local countryside is a vital and valued asset for Central Bedfordshire residents. Access to greenspace promotes individual well-being, provides social contact with others and enables families to spend quality time together. It provides health and quality of life 'free of charge' and is an environmentally sustainable resource offering local access to communities without recourse to a car.

Research was carried out with the Bedfordshire Consultation Group Panel ²⁷ to ask for opinions on the countryside and open spaces in Bedfordshire. 1103 Bedfordshire residents were surveyed and although this was a county wide survey, it remains relevant as 61% of responses were from Central Bedfordshire residents.

When asked how often people use the countryside 57% of respondents visited the countryside on a daily or weekly basis. From a list of features, respondents were asked to state which they liked most about the countryside, woodlands were marginally the most popular feature over river and lakes and open landscapes.



²⁷ Bedfordshire Consultation Group Panel Telephone Survey of Bedfordshire Residents, October 2007

Almost a third of all respondents tried to find out about new walks, rides or countryside sites, with almost 40% of these respondents finding out about them through word of mouth.

Respondents were given a list of all major Central Bedfordshire countryside sites and parks and asked how often they visited them. Dunstable Downs was the most visited site/park with 7% of all respondents visiting the Downs on a daily or weekly basis.

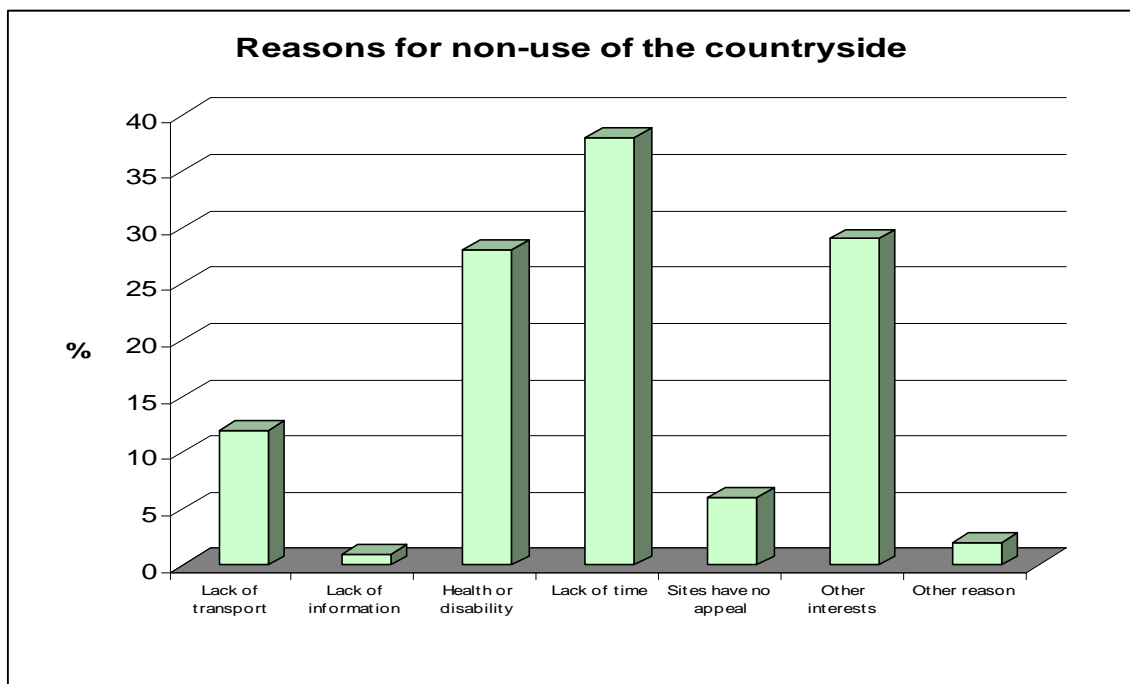
Site	Daily (%)	Weekly (%)	Monthly (%)	Few times per Year. (%)	Rarely (%)	Never (%)
Amphill Park	0	4	6	18	20	51
Marston Millennium Country Park	0	2	7	18	16	57
Rushmere Country Park *	1	3	8	12	11	65
Dunstable Downs *	1	6	12	25	30	26
Swiss Garden *	0	1	2	15	24	58
Sundon Hills Country Park *	0	1	2	6	11	80

* - CBC owned site

Respondents were also asked to highlight favourite countryside characteristics; 64% identified peace and tranquillity as being most important, whilst almost half (48%) liked being able to get closer to nature and wildlife.

The survey also tried to ascertain what aspects of local greenspace local people felt needed improvement and how they should be prioritised. The results are below:

Type of Improvement	High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority
Improving access and reducing the need access by car	70	21	8
Provide new open spaces and access routes	62	26	12
Increased signage, surfacing, play areas	51	35	15
Supporting self-service - i.e. leaflets, websites, etc	50	37	12
Increased maintenance	48	41	11
Increase staff on the ground - more rangers/wardens & guided walks	33	38	28



The 43% of respondents who were non users or did not regularly access the countryside (daily or weekly) were asked the main reasons for not visiting the countryside or *not* visiting the countryside *more often*. Over a third (35%) stated that lack of time was the main reason for not visiting the countryside, while just under a third (32%) stated that their health or a disability prevented them from visiting.

This Plan focuses on thematic linkages which may help to change the perception that accessing the countryside requires time and effort. Promoting the countryside as a venue for exercise or community activity may help to integrate countryside access into other activities that people prioritise. The survey also demonstrates a need to continue work to improve the accessibility of greenspace to people with mobility restrictions.

4.3 The Importance of Breathing Spaces

The research carried out with the Bedfordshire Consultation Group Panel in October 2007 asked for residents views on the importance of the countryside access and the countryside in general. When asked how important the countryside is to feelings about the area, the majority (90%) stated that it was very or fairly important. When asked how important the countryside is to their quality of life, the vast majority (97%) said that it was either very or fairly important.

4.3.1 Breathing Spaces... as Growing Spaces

The Central Bedfordshire Development Strategy is key to creating, protecting and improving greenspaces in areas of growth. Policies covering accessible open space, leisure and open space development and local green space, amongst others, seek to ensure new communities enjoy appropriate access to the countryside and greenspaces.

4.3.2 Breathing Spaces... as Green Spaces

The Sustainable Communities Strategy²⁸ includes the priority 'caring for a green and clean environment'. This Plan supports the priority by encouraging and improving access to new and existing green spaces within and close to the growth areas, (e.g. Rushmere Park), providing a range of walking and cycling opportunities (e.g. Circular walks and the Dunstable Downs Multi user path and Totternhoe Greenway), enabling active lifestyles and protecting and raising awareness of biodiversity, through visitor management and engagement (e.g. Promoted walks and educational visits around sites to raise awareness of site management and the sites biodiversity and heritage).

²⁸ Sustainable Community Strategy 2010-2031: A prospectus for Central Bedfordshire, Central Bedfordshire Together <http://www.centraltogether.org.uk/vision-priorities/sustainable-community-strategy/>

4.3.3 Breathing Spaces... as Tourist Spaces

The council's' Local Economic Assessment²⁹ recognises the importance of Central Bedfordshire's 'high quality...natural environment' and the continued importance of the rural economy, particularly through leisure and tourism based activities including 'leisure flows to surrounding population centres'. Tourism is identified as a major growth sector and Central Bedfordshire is acknowledged to be home to 'major attractions and a raft of historic towns and villages, country houses, local attractions and activities for people of all ages'. A number of the council's' green space sites are already acknowledged tourism destinations however others have the potential to be attractive to tourists with promotion and development. The assessment stresses that the 'natural environment' (Dunstable Downs being the example cited) attracts nearly 5 million day and staying trips to the area (2008 data) linked to visitor spend of over £249m and a total economic value of almost £300m.

Much of Central Bedfordshire has benefitted from the Greensand Ridge Local Development Strategy, which identified a range of issues affecting economic performance, and delivered significant amount of investment into the area, benefitting tourists and visitors, improving countryside access opportunities and attracting new visitors, as well as supporting key rural businesses. The legacy of the Strategy will continue to be important to the local area over coming years.

4.3.4 Breathing Spaces... as Learning Spaces

The Sustainable Communities Strategy highlights that well used green spaces can provide an education resource. We demonstrate this by promoting school visits to country parks, such as Dunstable Downs and Rushmere Country Park and the delivery of the Forest Schools programme on some of our wooded sites. Schools and local groups (e.g. cubs, scouts) are also encouraged to visit their local sites which can be reached on foot such as Campton Wood, Flitwick Wood and Baulk Wood.

The Youth Parliament is involved in the management of the council's sites, so that Children and Young People are involved in decisions and can help to ensure that access provision is designed to fit their needs.

Through our site management partners, training schemes in landscaping and environment management are being implemented on our green spaces. These develop young people's skills and work experience and provide a link to further volunteering and employment opportunities.

²⁹ Sustainable Communities Central Bedfordshire Local Economic Assessment 2011

4.3.5 Breathing Spaces... as Wildlife Spaces

The council works with partners to effectively manage and maintain biodiversity on green spaces and also looks to provide managed access, interpretation and education to increase understanding and awareness of nature.

4.3.6 Breathing Spaces... as Artistic Spaces

The Central Bedfordshire Public Art Framework highlights significant opportunities for art presented by leisure and open spaces. Artistic involvement with the design and development of parks, play and recreation spaces can help “develop a sense of ownership by local communities” and increase appeal to current non-users of green spaces. This has already been demonstrated through council projects at Campton Plantation and Rushmere Park where it is recognised that there is scope for an increased use of art within countryside sites.

CASE STUDY – CAMPTON WOOD SCULPTURE TRAIL



The popular Campton Wood sculpture trail now features 13 sculptures and carved benches, 3 iconic totem poles, interpretation and waymarking all celebrating local heritage and wildlife, including the wet woodland.

The project was designed to i attract a wider cross section of the community into the woodland and has proved very successful in attracting new local users.

Over £60k of external funding was secured to complete these works including funds from WREN Local Landscapes, the Environment Agency, Section 106 developer contributions and free tree work from Steve Dear Tree Services Ltd.

4.4 Breathing Spaces: The Next 10 Years

Produce Greenspace and Access Masterplans for Targeted Areas

The council, in partnership with other local stakeholders, will develop new area based countryside access and greenspace masterplans that will produce long term management proposals for the countryside features of the area. Over the period of the plan the council will work with communities and partners to review the need for and prepare access and greenspace master plans in areas of the Ouzel Valley, Ivel Valley, 'Chalk Arc' area (around North Luton and Dunstable), Flit, Greensand and Marston Vale areas. The order that these will be looked at will be determined by opportunity and risk assessment.

Provide Access to Small Green spaces

Many rural villages and communities do not have accessible natural green spaces at the 0 – 20ha criteria. The challenge is to ensure that opportunities are taken to develop smaller neighbourhood / pocket green spaces and ensure that existing green and open spaces sites maximise opportunities to create natural habitats, along side there primary use. The leisure strategy will aim to remedy this situation and will identify areas of greenspace and a summary of provision will be produced per Parish.

Create Large Green spaces

There are no existing 500ha+ sub regional sites in Central Bedfordshire. The south of the area can access the Ashridge Estate in Hertfordshire, but this site is already at capacity, out of catchment and difficult to drive to for much of the area. The council will seek opportunities to work in partnership with private landholders, create new sites and consolidate land around existing sites and council holdings to create sub regional sites. We will focus on opportunities which exist within the Forest of Marston Vale looking at interconnecting sites and improving access provision between Cranfield, Brogborough and Marston Moretaine and the areas around Leighton Buzzard where opportunities exist to link existing and proposed sites.

Improve Network of Green spaces

The council are working towards achieving a cohesive network of easily accessible, safe, attractive and welcoming parks, gardens and green spaces which meet the needs of everyone and which contribute to the economic, social and environmental well-being of people and places, now and for future generations.

4.5 Action Plan Summary for Breathing Spaces

The main Aims and Outcomes of the Action Plan for Breathing Spaces are detailed below. The specific projects relating to these aims are laid out in detail in the Action Plan which will be reviewed and updated every 5 years.

Aim 5 - Well Managed Countryside Spaces

Outcome - Countryside sites will be managed to a good state of repair, with visitors understanding the sites and their management and having regard to the intrinsic qualities of the landscape.

Outcome - Visitors will know the location of their nearest space and be aware of their travel choices.

Outcome – Existing Sites will be enhanced to complement the intrinsic qualities of the landscape, its history and biodiversity whilst meeting the demands of local communities and the growth agenda.

Aim 6 - Commons, Village Greens and Access Areas will be legally defined with people understanding their rights

Outcome - People understand where their nearest Common, Village Green or Access Area is and are confident of how to use it.

4.6 Policies for Breathing Spaces

OAIP - Policy Statement 6 – New Greenspace

The council will work with communities to explore the feasibility of new greenspaces and to deliver access and green space proposals.

OAIP - Policy Statement 7 – Green Infrastructure

The council will use Green Infrastructure plans and the Green Infrastructure priority network to identify and enhance existing green spaces and corridors, seeking to utilise Planning Obligations and Community Infrastructure Levy funding to deliver the Green Infrastructure improvements.

OAIP - Policy Statement 8 – Managing for the Historic Environment

The council will protect, conserve, enhance where appropriate and promote access, interpretation and enjoyment of heritage assets including archaeological and historic landscape sites and features.

The council will manage heritage assets in accordance with English Heritage's *Conservation Principles: Policies and Guidance* (2008).

OAIP - Policy Statement 9 - Public Art in the Countryside

The council will consider opportunities for the creation of public art on countryside sites and walking and cycling routes in line with the Central Bedfordshire Public Art Framework.

Local Spaces: Community Involvement and Participation

...the green space on our doorstep



5 Local Spaces ... Community Involvement and Participation

...the green space on our doorstep

Our ambition is to strengthen the connections between people and nature. We want more people to enjoy the benefits of nature by giving them freedom to connect with it. Everyone should have fair access to a good-quality natural environment. We want to see every child in England given the opportunity to experience and learn about the natural environment. We want to help people take more responsibility for their environment, putting local communities in control and making it easier for people to take positive action.

DEFRA: The natural choice: securing the value of nature 2011

5.1 What are Local Spaces?

Local spaces are about people; the way that individuals and communities learn and explore their landscape and environment, the way that they engage with, participate in and enjoy the spaces in and around their community. The council undertakes and supports a range of activities which aim to help people and communities engage with the countryside.

5.1.1 Participation and Volunteering



Central Bedfordshire has an established commitment to supporting community volunteering in environment, access and green space management activities. Along with third sector organisations that operate in the area, the council has developed its own P3 (People, Projects, Partnerships) initiative to involve volunteers in environmental and conservation tasks. The scheme was established in 1992 and has grown from strength to strength, operating 2 main strands of work:

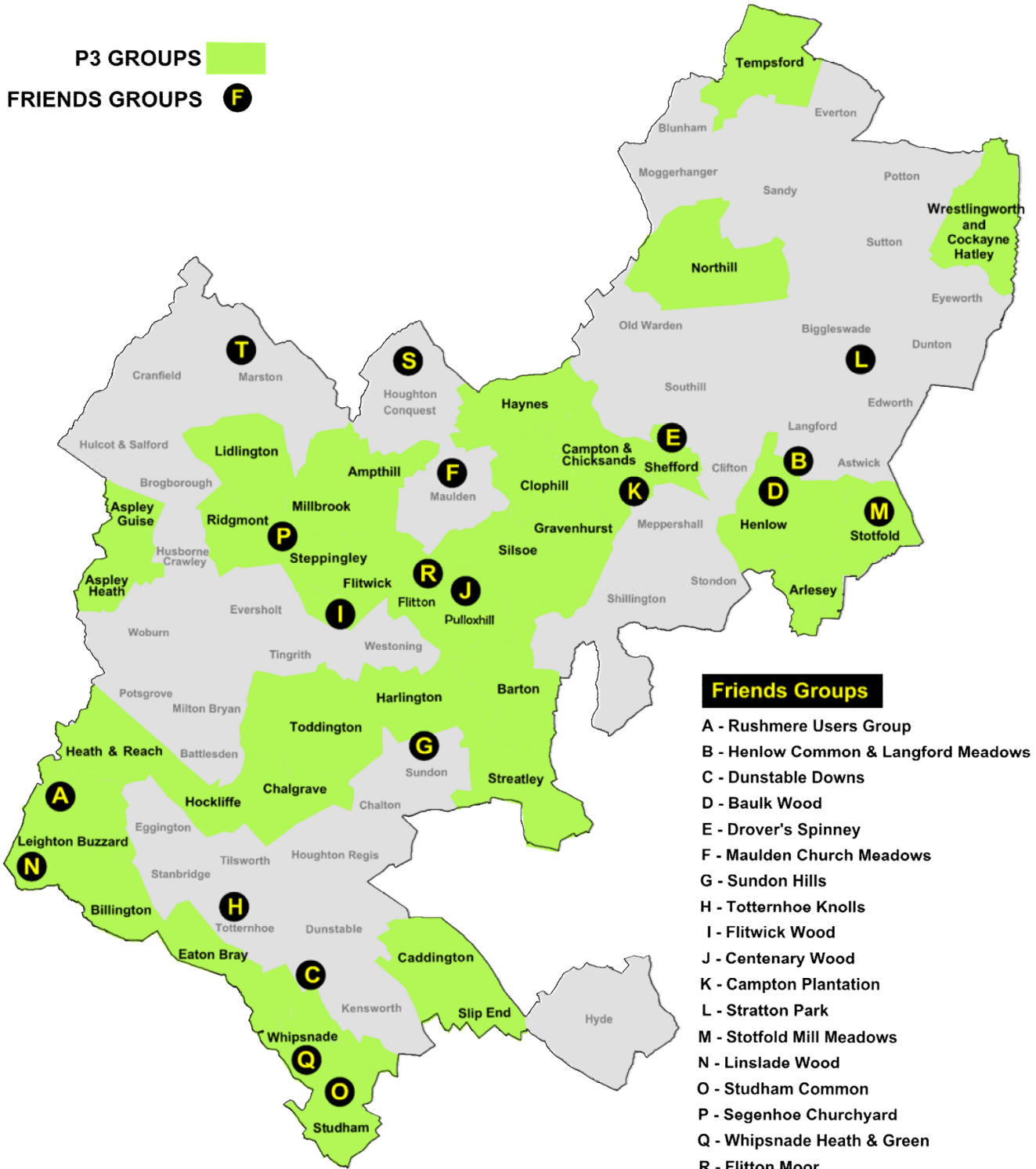
- Parish or area based volunteering (P3 parishes) – Central Bedfordshire now has 39 P3 Groups supporting 400 volunteers
- Countryside site based ‘friends of’ schemes – Central Bedfordshire has 16 friends of groups with 3 more groups in development, equating to 300 volunteers

The council also supports a range of volunteers from other organisations including the Greensand Trust, the National Trust, Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity and Groundwork, who deliver additional maintenance work on the network.

The council contracts a number of Third Sector partners to assist in supporting P3 and friends of groups including the Greensand Trust and Beds Rural Communities Charity. The Community managed greenspaces are key to empowering local people. Stemming from a tangible local need, these spaces are created by local communities, for local communities, allowing local people to take control of their environment, get involved and become more active.

P3 AND FRIENDS GROUPS

P3 GROUPS
FRIENDS GROUPS F



Friends Groups

- A - Rushmere Users Group
- B - Henlow Common & Langford Meadows
- C - Dunstable Downs
- D - Balk Wood
- E - Drover's Spinney
- F - Maulden Church Meadows
- G - Sundon Hills
- H - Totternhoe Knolls
- I - Flitwick Wood
- J - Centenary Wood
- K - Campton Plantation
- L - Stratton Park
- M - Stotfold Mill Meadows
- N - Linslade Wood
- O - Studham Common
- P - Segenhoe Churchyard
- Q - Whipsnade Heath & Green
- R - Flitton Moor
- S - Kings Wood & Glebe Meadows
- T - Marston Thrift

5.1.2 Green Flag

Two 'Friends of' groups and one Trust, supported by the council received 'Green Flag Community Awards' (originally called Green Pennant) in 2012. The Award provides national recognition for the achievements of communities who work together to manage a site for the benefit of local people.

The Green Flag Community Award Winners were:

- Studham Common (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012)
- Linslade Wood (2011, 2012)
- Stotfold Mill Nature Reserve (2012)

The council will continue to support Friends and P3 groups to achieve Green Flag Awards for council owned and managed sites and aspire to achieving Green Flag status on all our major sites.

CASE STUDY - STUDHAM COMMON



The Friends of Studham Common were founded in 1997 to help maintain and preserve the Common, for people and wildlife. Since the groups' foundation they have:

- Restored and maintained overgrown bridleways and footpaths
- Replanted over 500 metres of hedgerow
- Reclaimed over two hectares (4.9 acres) of grasslands and woodland glades
- Put up nesting boxes for birds, bats and dormice
- Offered monthly work parties offering volunteering opportunities for all including disadvantaged people and young people
- Created interpretive panels and leaflets to provide information to visitors

Community Engagement

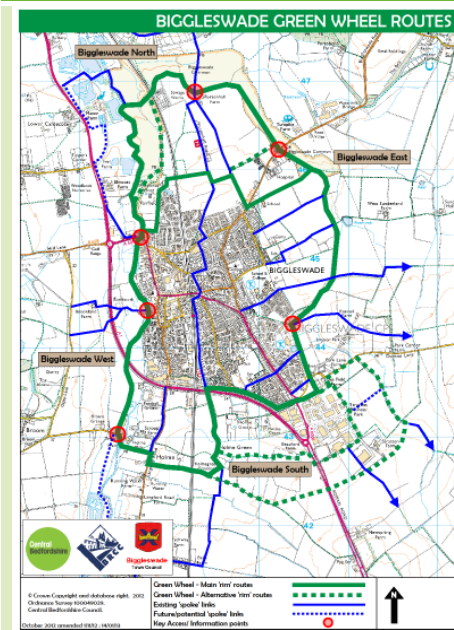
Being visible and listening to our communities has always been a strong driver for local authority delivery. Community engagement is particularly important for effective management and promotion of countryside access and to this end the council runs and supports an annual programme of events and activities including public walks and talks. These are seen as excellent opportunities to meet both users and non users of countryside facilities. Examples of events include:

- Eid Festival at Dunstable Downs (annually from 2006) with National Trust
- Guided walks as part of the Bedfordshire Ramblers Walking Festival (annual)
- Run Wild at Baulk Wood (annually from 2007) with BRCC
- Guided walks to mark launch of sculpture trail at Campton Wood (2011)
- Guided walks to mark launch of sculpture/ family trail at Rushmere Country Park (2012) with the Greensand Trust

5.1.3 Working with Town and Parish Council's

The council has established relationships with Town and Parish Council's and continues to strive to improve communication and partnerships. In line with the localism agenda, the council seeks to 'enable communities to do more themselves'. In the management of countryside access much of our traditional contact has been developed through the P3 Scheme. In recent years we have been developing more practical partnerships, assisting communities in green infrastructure planning, master planning and delivery of access and greenspace projects for communities. In 2012 the council consulted with Town and Parish Council's on the potential for them to participate further in the management of sites and rights of way in line with the localism agenda.

CASE STUDY – BIGGLESWADE GREEN WHEEL



The Council have been working in partnership with Biggleswade Town Council (BTC) and Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (BRCC) to produce a Biggleswade Green Wheel Greenspace Masterplan. This is a long term vision for the linking of publically accessible green spaces and routes around the town encouraging walking and cycling use. This will establish a common vision and jointly agreed action plan for collective delivery.

5.1.4 Local Access Forum

The council has a statutory duty under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to establish and operate a Local Access Forum. Central Bedfordshire's forum was re-established as a joint forum with Luton Borough Council in 2009 following unitary review. The forum is administered, under contract, by Central Bedfordshire Council. It is a key vehicle for local consultation and provides a mechanism for the community to hold the council accountable for delivery of services.

5.1.5 Information and Promotion

Originally established in the late 1980's by Natural England's predecessor, the Countryside Commission, the Recreational Routes programme is still seen by local council's as critical to encouraging people to explore the natural environment. The council manages:

- 9 Promoted Circular Walks.
- 7 Horse Riding Routes that were developed jointly with the British Horse Society.

- The Greensand Ridge Walk and is involved with at least 8 other externally developed linear routes.
- 6 Circular Off-Road Cycle Routes
- 10 Accessibility routes, which provide enhanced information to facilitate access to the countryside for those with permanent and temporary limited mobility

The council is committed to providing high quality information and interpretation at countryside sites. Interpretation Boards are available at all Countryside sites owned and managed by the council and at many Open Access areas.

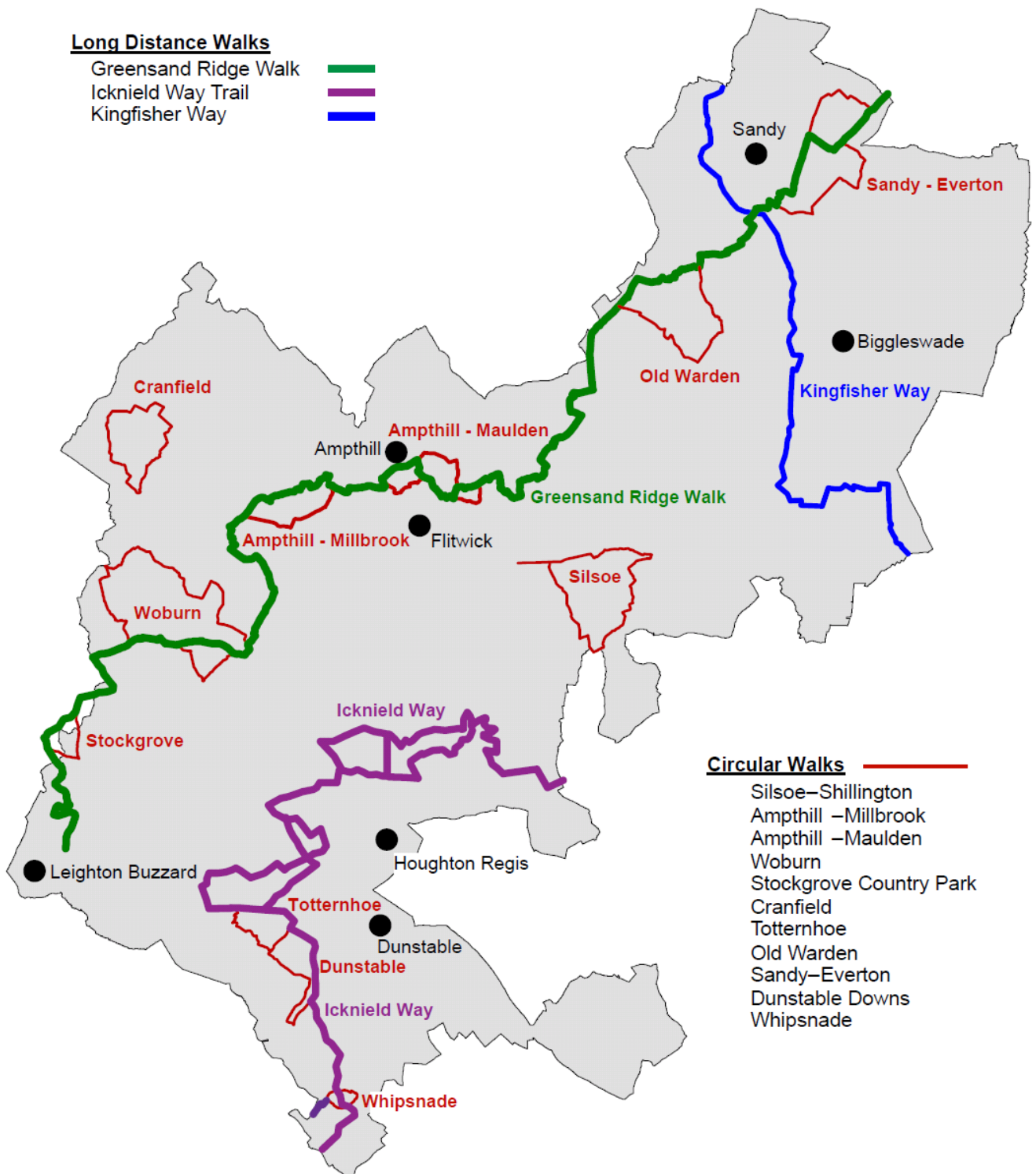
Information about sites and countryside activities is also available from the Central Bedfordshire Website www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk. The council also supports the 'Lets go' web site (www.letsgo.org.uk³⁰) jointly with Bedford Borough Council. This web site provides online access to walks and rides across the county.

We recognise that there is still demand from communities for leaflets. Leaflets are currently available to support promoted routes and the council will endeavour to continue this provision whilst there is the demand.

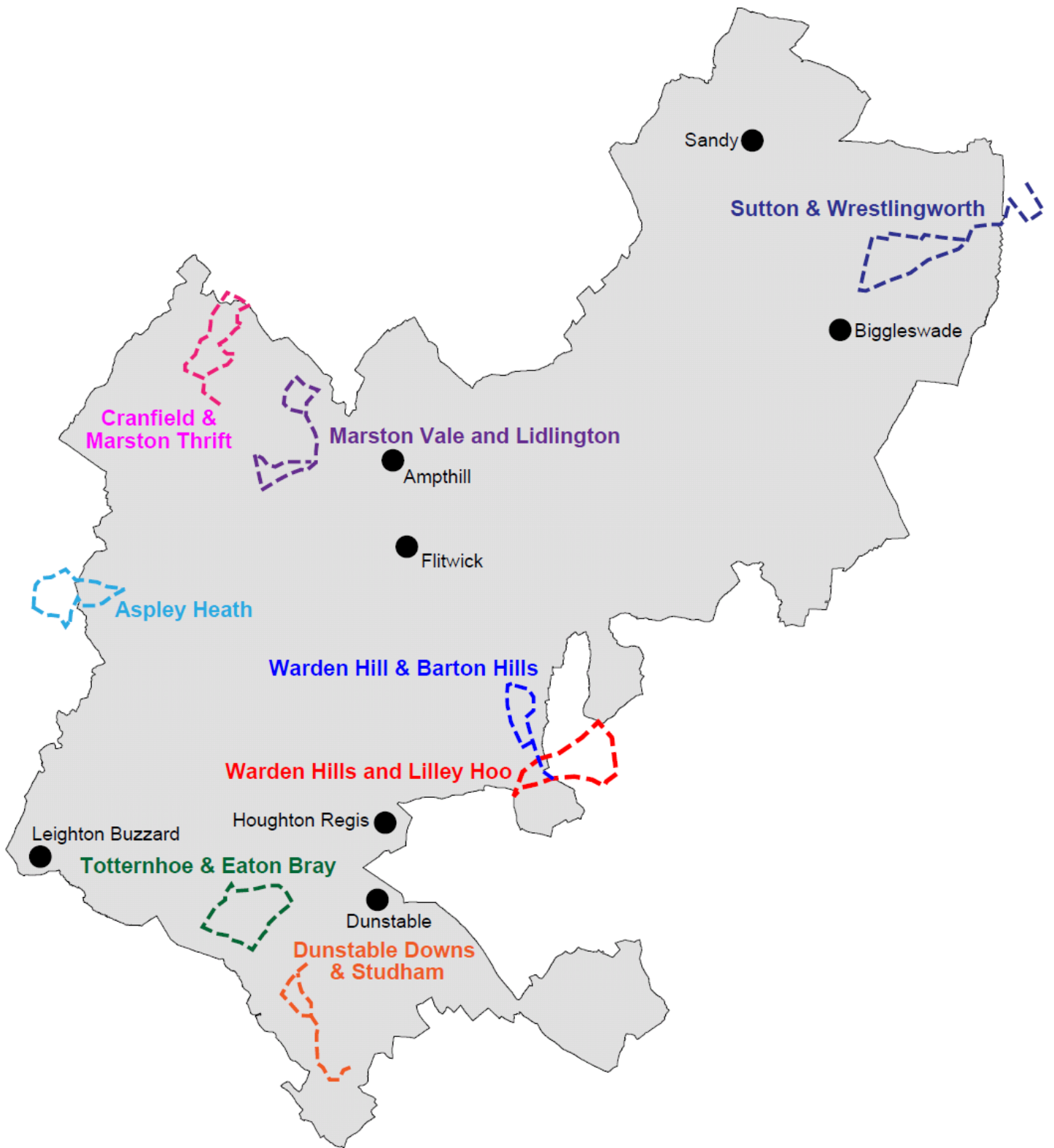
In addition to providing its own information, the council supports local communities through P3 to develop and promote their own leaflets and interpretation boards.

³⁰ www.letsgo.org.uk is an initiative developed by the Forest of Marston Vale and is managed by their volunteers, with financial support from Bedford and Central Bedfordshire Councils. The Web site hosts PDF information of over 300 Promoted Routes and Places to Visit.

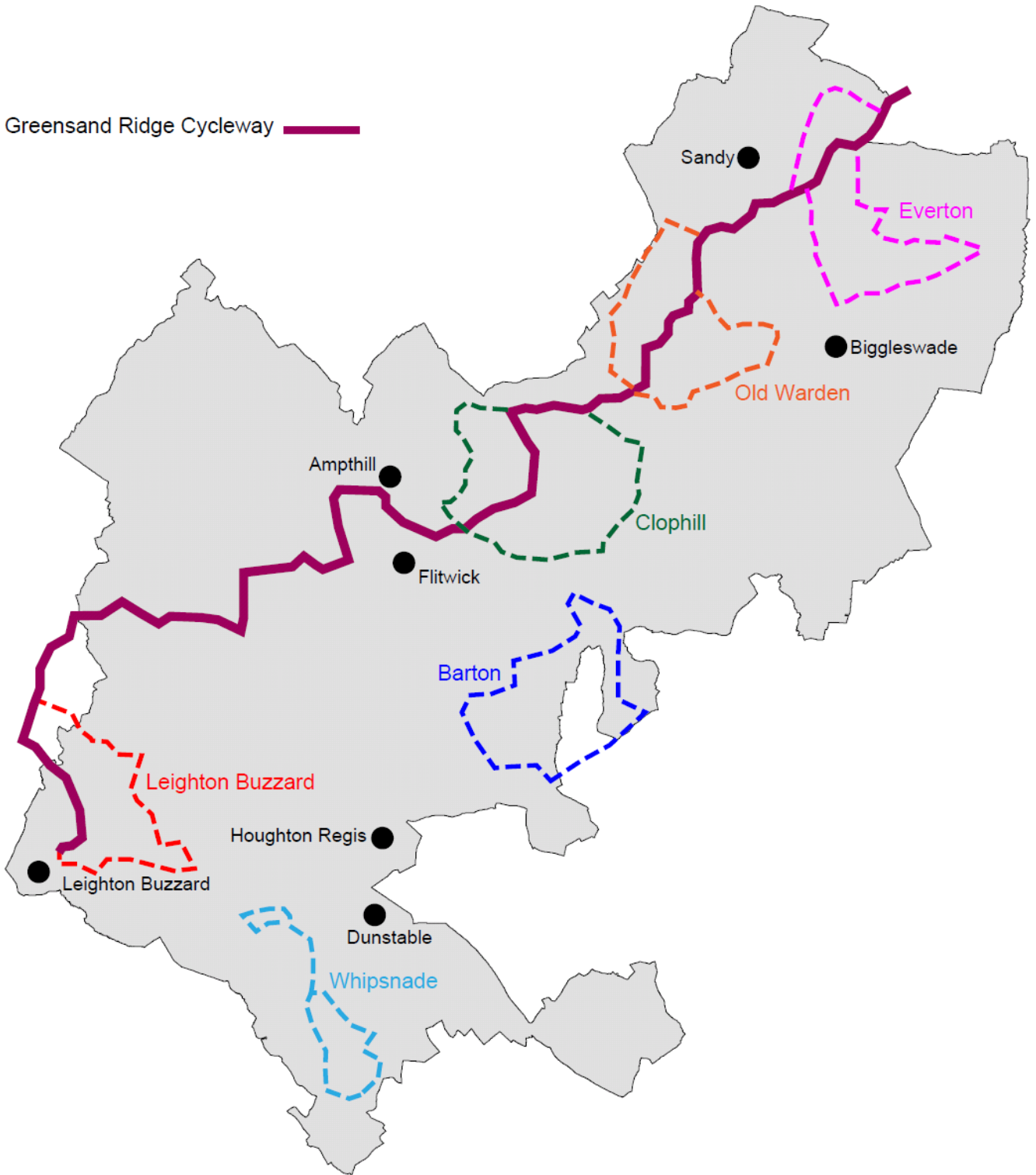
LONG DISTANCE WALKS AND CIRCULAR WALKS



HORSE RIDING ROUTES



GREENSAND RIDGE CYCLEWAY & CIRCULAR CYCLE ROUTES



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5.1.6 Walkers are Welcome



In 2012, the community of Sandy and its Town Council, applied for and were awarded the status of a '*Walkers are Welcome*³¹ Town. This scheme is different from most top-down accreditation schemes, in that it has emerged from, and is being promoted by, communities themselves. Initially developed in the north of England, Sandy is only the second community in the East of England and the first in Bedfordshire to receive the accreditation which evidences a communities commitment to making a walker's visit an enjoyable one. It helps to strengthen a town's reputation as a place for visitors to come to enjoy the outdoors, bringing useful benefits to the local economy.

The accredited towns have constituted themselves as the *Walkers are Welcome* Towns Network. This body (through its committee and its annual conference) develops and controls the *Walkers are Welcome* scheme and oversees use of the logo. In other words, the *Walkers are Welcome* idea and brand is collectively managed by the communities themselves who are participating – real grassroots democracy in action.

5.1.7 Management and Communication

The approach to the management of our Countryside sites is based upon a combination of ecological surveys, biodiversity planning and historic environment surveys, as well as user and non user public surveys and assessment of the intrinsic heritage and landscape qualities of each site. Understanding this is key to interpreting why a space looks the way it does and justifies the way it is managed.

Management of the Rights of Way network is primarily based on legislation with the council, Town and Parish Council's, landowners and the public all having roles to play. Understanding the variety of roles is critical to understanding both the council's approach to management and the effective input that can be made. The council works hard to clarify these roles through effective communication and the council's website has a number of guides for the public about undertaking legal events on the network.

5.2 How are Local Spaces Used?

Central Bedfordshire Council's 2011 resident's survey highlighted three key points regarding the significance of access for people to parks and countryside:

- Country parks, open spaces and rights of way are seen as important in making somewhere a good place to live. .
- The importance of parks and open spaces has increased substantially between 2008 and 2011 (42% in 2011 compared to 25% in 2008).
- Three-quarters of residents are satisfied with parks and open spaces in Central Bedfordshire. Younger people tend to be more positive about parks and open spaces than older people (80% under 35s versus 71% over 55s). There has been a significant change in satisfaction with parks since 2008 (67%). In 2008, The council³² was in the bottom quartile for satisfaction rates relating to its parks and open spaces compared to other Local Authorities, in 2011, the council was in the top quartile; a significant achievement.

The public's perceptions of parks and open spaces in Central Bedfordshire can account for 10% of the variation in public satisfaction with the council overall. This highlights the importance of the councils' work with greenspaces to local residents and provides evidence that greenspace is perceived to be of equal importance to education and other key services.

5.2.1 Volunteering

Volunteering and community engagement forms a central component in environmental management, with all third sector environmental groups as well as Central Bedfordshire Council, working with and supporting volunteers. Currently there is no council baseline assessment of the number of volunteer days spent on environmental activities. However the Local Strategic Partnership³³ Environment and Economy thematic group have established a Performance indicator³⁴ which monitors the increase in new volunteering enquiries. On average, there were 162 enquiries

³² 2008 survey related to Bedfordshire County Council; prior to Local Authority reorganisation

³³ Central Bedfordshire - Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) is called Central Bedfordshire Together. It's role is to provide the vision and strategic leadership to improve the quality of life for all people in Central Bedfordshire, as outlined in the Sustainable Community Strategy.

³⁴ Performance indicator - Number of people who are unemployed or economically inactive accessing information, advice and guidance on volunteering through the volunteer centres

each quarter during 2010/11, from people who were unemployed or economically inactive. These figures appear to be increasing along with national trends, and are being monitored every 6 months. Whilst this is a positive trend the council would also like to see an upward trend in the number of volunteer hours committed to environmental and conservation tasks and will therefore endeavour to ensure monitoring and recording mechanisms accurately assess volunteer contributions in support of the OAIP.

The make up of many volunteer groups is such that most volunteers are predominately white, male, middle-class and of retirement age. However it is recognised that volunteering can be both rewarding for people of any age and social background; with benefits to individual employability, skill levels and confidence. The challenge for the future will be to encourage volunteering from a wider variety of backgrounds.

Volunteers and users of the countryside also play a useful role in being the eyes and ears of their community, by working closely with the council, they improve the quality of the site, prevent fly tipping, littering and anti social activities and improve the perception of personal safety of Countryside.

5.2.2 Information and Promotion

The Rights of Way Survey 2010 identified that ‘the propensity for future use of rights of way network was high with 68% of respondents saying that they were very likely to use the facilities in the future and a further 16% would possibly do so’.

Users felt it was extremely important that the council continued to make available ‘information on the rights of way, to the public through as many sources as possible. Signs and notice boards were a popular source, but respondents also wished to obtain information from websites and from other council literature. That said word of mouth was the most frequently mentioned source for users interviewed on the pathways’.

These figures provide a strong mandate to the council’s need to maintain the rights of way and promoted routes networks, particularly where there are links to amenities, but also to continue to develop the range of publicity material and techniques used.

5.3 The Importance of Local Spaces

The DEFRA Third Sector Strategy (November 2008) includes the key objective “To help facilitate collective action, community empowerment, informal learning and community solutions which protect the natural environment, and create sustainable and resilient communities – in urban and rural areas”. The council’s programme of work relating to Local Spaces fully supports this work and is based on the understanding that the sustainability of countryside management and access is reliant on the support and involvement of the communities that use the facilities.

5.3.1 Local Spaces... as Community Spaces

The importance of outdoor access and green spaces in the development of community ownership, pride and social value has long been recognised. The 2011 Green Space report showed that effective management of parks, green spaces and rights of way meant that...

“communities use their spaces more, having a better relationship with their local council and take some pride in the area where they live. They provide communities with a sense of place and belonging, opportunities for recreation, health and fitness whilst supporting social cohesion and inclusive society. Research has also shown that the opposite is true, where there are poorly managed spaces, vandalism and neglect; the communities use of spaces is fractured, there is an increase in anti social behaviour and they can be seen as a blight on communities.”³⁵

The council will work cross departmentally and with key partners to manage spaces in a manner that reduces antisocial behaviour, considers community safety and increases community pride and ‘ownership’ of local greenspace.

5.3.2 Local Spaces... as Partnership Spaces

The Central Bedfordshire Local Strategic Partnership launched the Community Engagement Strategy in 2010. This strategy, sub titled ‘Communities doing more for themselves...’ seeks to develop new relationships with individuals and organisations, to help communities understand the tough choices and decisions ahead, and to manage their expectations about the service levels provided by the public sector in

³⁵ Green space – Understanding the contribution parks and greenspaces can make to improving peoples lives (2011)

the future, whilst enabling and facilitating communities. The strategy is based on five key principles, which are:

- Giving more people more opportunities to influence decisions
- Enabling Ward Councillors to be leaders in and for their communities
- Enhancing the role of Town and Parish Councils
- Building the capacity of local people to engage
- Ensuring a strategic and joined-up, coordinated partnership approach

Through the council's work in supporting P3 and 'Friends of groups', there is an established and mutually beneficial relationship with many Town and Parish Councils. The passing of the Localism Act has given this area of work a greater prominence and the view that the council should work more actively to engage with Local Councils to increase community participation.

5.3.3 Local Spaces... as Learning Spaces

The Natural Environment White Paper³⁶ includes the aspiration that 'we want to see every child in England given the chance to experience and learn about the natural environment'.

Through reviews in the National Curriculum and in The Government's White Paper, '*The Importance of Teaching*', teachers are being encouraged to create more opportunities for different routes to learning, including learning outside the classroom.

Many of the Countryside Sites that the council manages are close to schools and communities. Sites have been used for a variety of well received educational and learning activities, in partnership with third sector organisations. However there are opportunities to take greater advantage of sites as an educational resource. Currently the council does not provide resource information to schools, youth groups (scouts etc) or parents but this is an area for future development.

5.3.4 Local Spaces... as Economic Spaces

The value that volunteers bring to the area has been recognised by the Local Strategic Partnership³⁷, through its newly developed Volunteering Strategy.³⁸ The

³⁶ The Natural Choice – Securing the Value of Nature (2011)

Volunteering Strategy aims to increase and improve volunteering through three priorities:

- **Priority 1: People are inspired to volunteer**
- **Priority 2: People have the opportunity to volunteer**
- **Priority 3: People have excellent volunteering experiences**

The council and its partners in Bedfordshire Together need to consider how to come together to effect the delivery of this strategy. The council's P3 and 'Friends of' programmes will be part of this, with the intention that people will have greater opportunities to volunteer and improved volunteer coordination.

Although it is possible to apply a system for applying an economic value to the use of volunteers - this should be done with care as there is a risk that this will reinforce an erroneous perception that encouraging the use of volunteers is a cost saving exercise. In this case an economic assessment is useful only to evidence the cost effectiveness of the council's approach to countryside management and to justify continued support and investment. There are a number of ways to cost the economic value of volunteering, for example TCV utilises a typical unskilled labour rate of £50 a day³⁹. When this figure is used against our P3 and 'Friends of' volunteering estimates (which are believed to be lower than the actual figure), the figure of 3360 volunteer days a year, yields a financial value of £165,000 per annum. The VIVA approach⁴⁰ considers both the financial value of volunteering and the cost of delivering volunteer services. Using this approach the net value of volunteering would be £185,573, based on an average hourly employment rate of £7.89 for Eastern region parks and countryside rangers⁴¹. This means that for every £1 spent by the council on volunteering an additional £3 is generated.

Many walkers and users of the public rights of way network, benefit the economy by using paths to access amenities. Nationally there are 527 million walking trips to the English countryside. Expenditure associated with these walking trips is in the region of £6.1 billion and the majority of walking trips (87%) are undertaken from the home

³⁷ Central Bedfordshire - Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) is called Central Bedfordshire Together. It's role is to provide the vision and strategic leadership to improve the quality of life for all people in Central Bedfordshire, as outlined in the Sustainable Community Strategy.

³⁸ LSP - Volunteer Strategy is expected to be published in Nov 2012.

³⁹ BTCV annual review 2007-2008

⁴⁰ Volunteer Investment and Value Audit published in 2011

⁴¹ Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2011

(i.e. leisure day trips).⁴² In a recent survey within Central Bedfordshire it was evident that shops, cafes and pubs were the key beneficiaries of income spent by walkers using the rights of way in Bedfordshire. 72% of users routinely visit these amenities and 59% of those who purchased goods spent between £1 and £10 per visit.⁴³ This is clearly a substantial investment into the local economy from users of the countryside.

5.4 Local Spaces: The Next 10 Years

Community Participation

The council will continue to support and extend the P3 and 'friends of' initiatives, investing in the training and skill development of volunteers.

The council, in conjunction with partners, will seek to widen the range of volunteers to more closely reflect the make up of the local population, increase the variety of activities volunteers can get involved in and ensure accurate recording of volunteer hours committed to activities supporting the OAIP.

Green Flag Awards

The council will continue to support Friends and P3 groups to achieve Green Flag Awards on council owned and managed sites.

Town and Parish Council involvement

Opportunities will be taken to extend work with Town and Parish Councils, keeping them informed of the councils work in their area and giving them opportunities to influence and get involved as well as exploring governance and management options.

The council will continue to work with partners to engage with Town and Parish Councils through activities like Neighbourhood Planning and Parish GI Planning.

⁴² The economic and social value of walking in England, Dr Mike Christie (Lecturer at the Institute of Rural Studies, University of Wales Aberystwyth) and Jon Matthews (Independent Research Consultant) September 2003

⁴³ Central Bedfordshire Council, Rights of Way Survey (2010) this survey interviewed 404 rights of way users at random along 12 rights of way, and in addition 1012 respondents were interviewed on the telephone.

The council will assist local council's in exploiting the potential of CIL funding to support greenspace and GI improvements.

Supporting the Rural Economy

When reviewing and developing our promoted route publicity material, opportunities will be sought to promote rural businesses; further benefits will be explored through the other chapters and in particular the leisure strategy.

The council will continue to support Sandy as a 'Walkers are Welcome' Town and seek to support communities and businesses wishing to gain this accreditation.

Promoted routes and information

Existing promoted routes will be managed and promoted with a focus on web-based information. Options will be explored to externally support the financial cost of printing. The council will look to republish a number of road based cycling routes and seek to develop a new off road cycle route in the Cranfield area. More accessibility routes will be developed to encourage access for people with limited mobility or those with pushchairs.

Opportunities to enhance the availability of information will be explored with the use of technologies. GPS mapping of routes and the use of QR codes will also be reviewed.

Technical information

The council's online information to support definitive map legal events will be enhanced with information provided on rights of way management processes. Opportunities to fund and resource the development of a 'Practical Guide to Rights of Way Management' will be investigated.

Countryside site management plans and statements will be published on the council's web site.

Environmental Education

The council will actively engage with schools to encourage the use of their nearest natural space. Funding will be sought to develop resource information that will inform schools, youth groups and parents.

5.5 Action Plan Summary for Local Spaces

The main Aims and Outcomes of the Action Plan for Local Spaces are detailed below. The specific projects relating to these aims are laid out in detail in the Action Plan which will be reviewed and updated every 5 years.

Aim 7 – More people volunteering to support OAIP objectives

Outcome – More people will be aware and taking opportunities to volunteer on the environmental and other initiatives in their area which support the aspirations and objectives of the OAIP

Aim 8 – Increased Town and Parish Council involvement in countryside sites and rights of way management and development

Outcome – Town and Parish Councils have more opportunities to be involved in the management and development of local sites and the local rights of way network.

Aim 9 – The council will contribute to supporting the rural economy

Outcome – Local Businesses have more opportunities to benefit from the development of sites and Rights of Way.

Outcome - Visitor numbers to Central Bedfordshire countryside sites will increase

Outcome - Employment opportunities for the Local Area will be maximised

Aim 10 – More people have access to good quality information and are aware of countryside access close to them

Outcome – People will be able to access information about local sites and promoted routes

Outcome – There will be an increased level of awareness of facilities close to where people live.

Aim 11 – Support and Provide Environmental Education opportunities

Outcome – Parents and schools will have information on access to their local environment

5.6 Policies for Local Spaces

The policies for Local Spaces will support the delivery plan but also ensure that the council, its partners and the wider community deliver outdoor and countryside access in line with agreed principles.

OAIP - Policy Statement 10 – P3

The council will continue to support and extend the P3 and 'Friends of' approach, seeking to widen its investment in and the skills of volunteers working in the environmental sector.

OAIP - Policy Statement 11 – Community Involvement

The council will ensure that local and community involvement principles are written into area master plans and site management plan documents.

OAIP - Policy Statement 12 – Community Engagement and development

The council will ensure that development proposals provide or enhance opportunities for community engagement with outdoor access and the local countryside.

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Healthy Spaces: Health and Wellbeing

...which encourage us to get active



6 Healthy Spaces: Health and Wellbeing

...which encourage us to get active

There is evidence that green space in an urban environment can improve life expectancy and decrease health complaints.

Local access to safe natural green space can help individuals sustain levels of physical activity. The motivation to continue physical activity schemes is more likely to be sustained through the natural environment.

Dr William Bird, Natural Fit (2004)

6.1 What are Healthy Spaces?

Healthy spaces are countryside sites and rights of way which can be used to generate benefits to health. The councils' network of greenspace, Public Rights of Way and countryside sites is ideal for low-cost exercise and physical activity, including walking, cycling, riding, organised sports, play and active recreation. The OAIP seeks to encourage the increased use of greenspaces to improve health and well-being in Central Bedfordshire in line with the councils' Physical Activity Strategy (Chapter 4 of the Leisure Strategy).

CASE STUDY – ACTIVITIES AT DUNSTABLE DOWNS



Dunstable Downs is a council owned site, managed by the National Trust under a lease and management agreement.

It has long been a popular destination for walking and soaking up the magnificent views, but over the last few

years, a programme of activities have raised the profile of exercise and physical activity on the site. In addition to a new popular new Health Walk, which meets at the Chilterns Gateway Visitors Centre, the National Trust hosts a weekly Military fitness group and large scale events like the Kite Festival which promotes outdoor activity.

6.1.1 Walking, Cycling and Riding Routes

The geographic diversity of Central Bedfordshire is ideal to meet the needs of the walking and cycling community and is accessible via 1335 kilometres of Public Rights of Way, promoted walks and horse and cycle routes. These are detailed in Section 5 – ‘*Local Spaces*’. Cycle ownership in Central Bedfordshire is relatively high with some 60% of residents having access to a bike and there is an increasing interest in joining running and triathlon clubs. The council will be seeking to increasingly promote the area as a cycling, running and walking destination for both local people and tourists.

Following the recent award of £4.9 million from the Sustainable Transport Fund, Central Bedfordshire Council is focused on creating a comprehensive network of pedestrian and cycling routes to cater for commuters and enable access to services. Part of this funding has provided a Travel Hub in Dunstable to give advice and support around sustainable transport in the local area. Sustrans, who man the centre, are able to offer cycling and local travel initiatives to members of the public as well as

schools in the local area. There is also provision for Health Checks that are available every Friday through NHS Bedfordshire.

In line with this aspiration to increase walking and cycling, the council is seeking to develop the Rights of Way network to allow multi use; opening up new routes providing greater connectivity and improving access to green spaces and other leisure destinations.

6.1.2 Health Walks

The Walking for Health programme,⁴⁴ managed by the Ramblers Association, encourages more people to become physically active in their local communities through participation in local guided health walks. The council supports the programme locally by commissioning the Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (BRCC) to run the 'Simply Walking' scheme on its behalf. This volunteer delivered scheme includes thirteen separate health walk routes, encourages people to 'simply walk your way to health' and primarily targets the over 60's and those at risk of obesity and diabetes. In 2011, 343 walks were held with an average of 20.5 people attending each walk, with 7016 people benefitting over the course of the year.

The council also supports the Department of Health Walk4Life campaign which aims to help people to get active and fit. The council has eighteen registered Walk4Life routes on the website;⁴⁵ equating to 10% of the total registered Walk4Life walks across Central Bedfordshire and totalling 34 miles (54.7km). The council is also developing a series of Walk4Life Mile routes; which are mile long, waymarked, routes using rights of way.

⁴⁴ <http://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk/>

⁴⁵ www.walk4life.info

6.1.3 Green Exercise

The concept of the Green Gym was created by TCV (The Conservation Volunteers) as one of their flagship volunteering programmes; using conservation and volunteering as a form of exercise. The Authority has an active volunteer network and offer a similar green exercise opportunity across the rights of way and countryside sites of Central Bedfordshire. P3 and Friends groups provide wide-ranging opportunities to promote practical volunteering within local communities as a mechanism of keeping fit, reducing obesity and putting something back into the community.

The council is also looking to develop exercise and fitness initiatives such as the installation of outdoor exercise equipment, trim trails, orienteering courses and the use of sites by exercise classes such as 'military fitness' inspired boot camps. A recent research study⁴⁶ found that compared with exercising indoors, exercising in an outdoor natural environment was associated with greater feelings of revitalisation and wellbeing, decreased tension, confusion, anger and depression and an increased likelihood of repeating the activity on a regular basis.

6.1.4 Children's Play

Natural or nature play is part of the available range of play space provided by Central Bedfordshire, 'encouraging children to climb, jump, touch and explore the natural environment through play'. The council manages 58 countryside sites which offer opportunities for physical activity and play in the widest sense. However eleven sites have been additionally equipped with 'designed' natural play and one has a 'trim / activity trail' for under 6 year olds.

In recent years a number of 'natural play' events have been run on the council's sites; including the BIG Lottery funded 'Run Wild' events at Baulk Wood run in partnership with the Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity. These events, and others involving the Greensand Trust, have aimed to re-engage families with the countryside through a range of 'natural play' activities including den building.

⁴⁶ J. Thompson Coon, K. Boddy, K. Stein, R. Whear, J. Barton, M. H. Depledge. Does Participating in Physical Activity in Outdoor Natural Environments Have a Greater Effect on Physical and Mental Wellbeing than Physical Activity Indoors? A Systematic Review. *Environmental Science & Technology*, 2011

Site	Type of 'Play'
Rushmere Country Park	Natural Sculpture Trail
Dunstable Downs	Formal Outdoor Fitness equipment
Blue Waters and Plaiters Way	Natural
Tiddenfoot	Natural Trim/ Activity Trail
Baulk Wood	Natural
Campton Wood	Natural Sculpture Trail
Saxon Gate Pocket Park	Natural
Biggleswade Linear Wood	Natural
Clipstone Brook	Formal Play Area
Apennine Way	Formal Play Area
Steppingstone Place	Sports facility

6.1.5 Well Maintained Sites and Rights of Way

A Natural England study published in 2011⁴⁷ suggested that better provision of green space may encourage greater levels of green space use, which could lead to greater participation in physical activity and help reduce levels of obesity. The study found particularly strong associations between green space use and site maintenance; with use being influenced by the quality of the path network, standard of site maintenance and lighting.

The chapters on 'Breathing Spaces' and 'Connecting Spaces' provide detail about the current standards of Rights of Way and Countryside Sites and highlight issues and opportunities which can contribute to increased use and associated health benefits.

⁴⁷ Natural England Green space access, green space use, physical activity and overweight, April 2011

6.1.6 Leisure Strategy Physical Activity Strategy

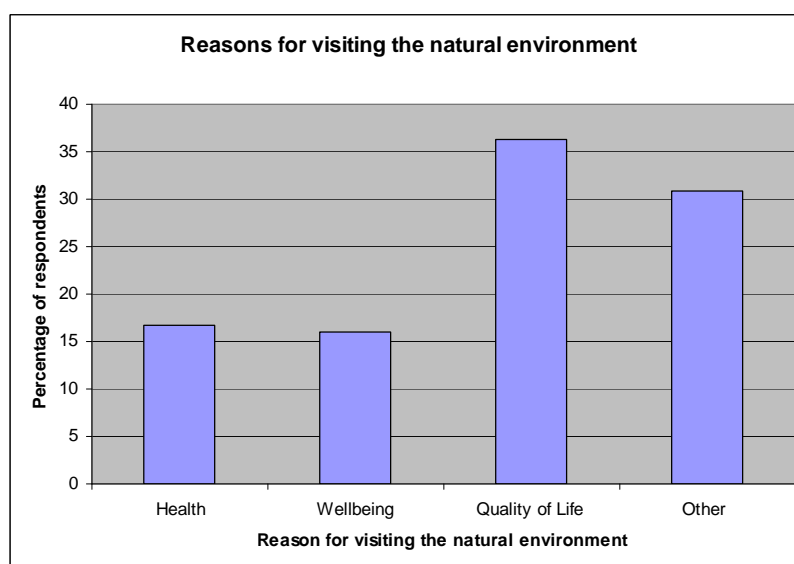
The council is producing a Physical Activity Strategy as part of the Leisure Strategy. The underlying principles of the Physical Activity Strategy are to inform choice and promote physical activity, creating positive links across services, and reduce the cost to Public Health due to inactivity by providing formal pathways for people who need or want to be healthy and active.

Physical activity is the 4th leading risk factor for mortality. Levels of inactivity are rising for many countries with major implications for the prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCD) and general health of the population. It has been shown that participation in regular physical activity reduces the risk of: Coronary Heart Disease, Stroke, Diabetes, Cancer, Hypertension and Depression.⁴⁸

The Physical Activity Strategy is currently auditing available activity. This audit will establish demographic information on users and provide information about the demand for additional activities.

6.2 How are Healthy Spaces Used?

In Bedfordshire, health and wellbeing, and improving the wider quality of life are the main reasons for people to visit the natural environment.

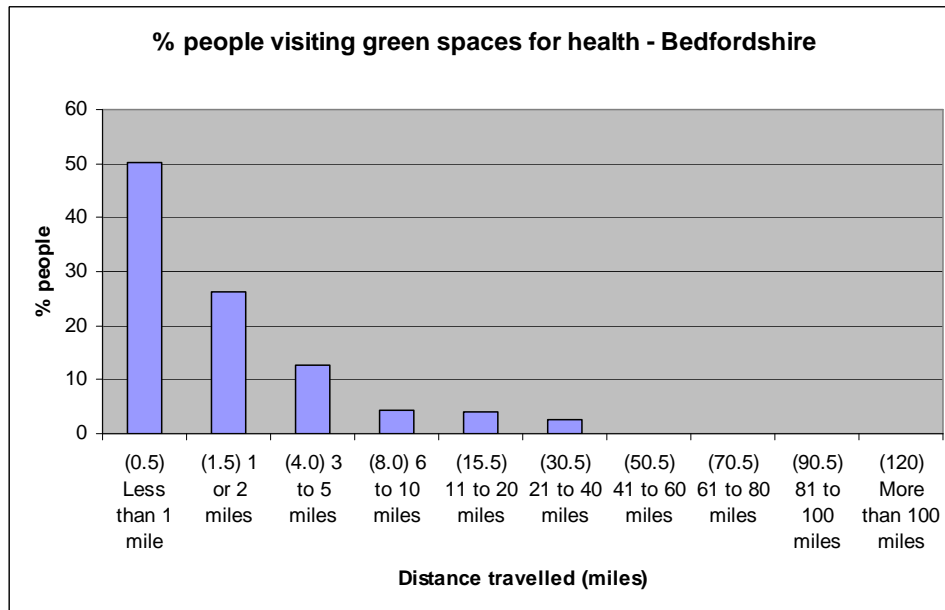


*Reasons for visiting the natural environment in Bedfordshire*⁴⁹

⁴⁸ World Health Organisation, Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health.

⁴⁹ Data from Natural England survey - Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment, March 09 - Feb2011, published online at www.naturalengland.org.uk

Accessible green space, close to residential areas generates increased levels of physical activity across all age groups⁵⁰, and is therefore an important, but often overlooked, factor in improving health. Over 50% of Bedfordshire visitors to the countryside, whose primary reason for visiting was for health benefits travelled less than 1 mile and over 75% travelled less than 2 miles (3.2km). This highlights the need to ensuring appropriate access to local greenspace in order to promote health equality.



The importance of local green spaces for health⁵¹

The Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) is the national survey on people and the natural environment used as a measure for the Public Health Outcomes Framework 1.16 'utilisation of greenspace'. Survey results from March 2010 to February 2011 showed a direct association between the frequency of visits to the outdoors and levels of physical exercise. 49% of those who visited the natural environment frequently took part in at least 30 minutes of physical activity at least three times a week, compared to just 22% of those who never visited the natural environment.

Although planning policies now often stipulate that green spaces should be incorporated into urban planning, there are no minimum national requirements or

⁵⁰ The Great Outdoors: How our Natural Health Service uses greenspace to improve wellbeing, Faculty of Public Health, 2010.

⁵¹ Data from Natural England survey - Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment, March 09 - Feb2011, published online at www.naturalengland.org.uk

guidelines to support this. The ANGST standards provide a means to do this; identifying that people in urban areas should be able to access a green space of at least 2 hectares (4.9 acres) in size within 300m or a 5 minute walk of their home.⁵² The Central Bedfordshire Council Leisure Strategy will also help to set standards for leisure provision and identify priorities for new and improved facilities.

As shown in 3.2 walking the dog is one of the main purposes of using the rights of way network, this is also reflected in our countryside sites user surveys. A study produced in 2010⁵³ found regular dog walkers had a lower body mass index (BMI), as well as fewer chronic conditions and depression-like symptoms than those who didn't walk dogs. And that walking a dog also enables a scheduled activity that is more fun and rewarding than having to drive to the gym to work out for most people.

6.3 The Importance of Healthy Spaces

Inactivity is described by the Department of Health as a 'silent killer'. Evidence is emerging that sedentary behaviour can increase a person's risk of many chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes as well as weight gain and obesity, all of which are costly to the Health Service. Regular exercise can lower the risk of heart disease and stroke by up to 35% and diabetes by up to 50%, boost self esteem and mood as well as reducing your risk of stress, depression, dementia and Alzheimer's disease by up to 30%.⁵⁴

While the overall health of people in Central Bedfordshire is good it is estimated that 29.1% of adults in Central Bedfordshire are obese; this is higher than the East of England average of 28.3%. Mental health is also a concern; the number of people with a mental health condition is predicted to rise and it is estimated that 33,500 people in Central Bedfordshire will suffer from anxiety and depression by 2016.⁵⁵

A 2009 report showed that the quality of the environment has a direct influence on the level of physical activity. It also demonstrated that exercising in a natural environment was shown to reduce chronic stress, enhance the sense of well-being and have a restorative effect on adults suffering from depression and anxiety. Given

⁵² Natural England Green space access, green space use, physical activity and overweight, April 2011

⁵³ Cindy Lentino, an exercise scientist at the George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services in Washington, D.C 2010

⁵⁴ www.nhs.uk/Livewell/fitness/Pages/whybeactive.aspx

⁵⁵ Adult and Older People JSNA v3, Central Bedfordshire Together 2010

that the annual national spend on parks is just £600m, a tiny budget compared to the £74.9 billion spent on health during 2003-2004, investment in more high quality, accessible and safe green space could result in a cost effective approach to addressing wellbeing issues.⁵⁶

6.3.1 Healthy Spaces... as Green Spaces

The Natural Environment White Paper⁵⁷ showed that while many people enjoy pleasant green spaces near where they live, this is not the case for everyone. People in deprived areas are nearly six times less likely than those in affluent ones to describe their area as 'green'. Those in deprived areas, minority ethnic communities, elderly people and those with disabilities have less access to greenspace or tend to use them less. A UK study has found that income-related inequality in health is affected by exposure to green space⁵⁸. It demonstrated that:

- Those with close access to green space lived longer than those with no green space
- The survival of older people increases where there is more space for walking near their home
- Children's physical activity levels increase in areas with good access to green space

This demonstrates the importance of the ANGST standards in guaranteeing local access to green spaces and highlights the need for programmes to get people into the countryside, particularly in areas of deprivation.

Natural green space also mitigate against negative impacts of climate change; improving air and noise pollution; cutting particulate pollution; lowering risk of flooding and creating a localised cooling effect. This has a beneficial impact on health; reducing incidences of pulmonary diseases, mental health disorders and heat exhaustion.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ A walk in the park Becky Volker, Feb 2005, Spaces & Places

⁵⁷ www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/

⁵⁸ Mitchell R, Popham F, (2008). Effect of exposure to natural environment on health inequalities: an observational population study. *The Lancet* 372 (9650)

⁵⁹ Health and Natural Environments- An Evidence Based Information Pack, Natural England March 2012

6.3.2 Healthy Spaces... as Local Spaces

The Public Health Strategy 'Healthy Lives, Healthy People'⁶⁰ explicitly recognises the environment (natural and built) as a determinant of health; stating that local communities must be empowered to protect green spaces and volunteer led walk programmes and promote community ownership of green spaces and improved access to land.

This empowerment of local communities is supported by the councils' continued management and development of volunteering opportunities such as the 'friends of parks' and P3. Many of our access and conservation volunteers are retired and older people. In addition our 'access for all' initiative develops paths for the less mobile providing wheelchair access to facilities which in the past have been inaccessible.

6.3.3 Healthy Spaces... as Economic Spaces

Greenspace plays an important role in delivering cost effective support for health and there is a need to increasingly consider the economic benefits of the countryside as part of preventative healthcare, to mitigate against the cost of reactive service provision.

It is estimated by 2050 that 60% of adult men, 50% of adult women and 25% of children under 16 could be obese and this would cost the NHS £10 billion a year and wider society £49.9 billion a year.⁶¹ The Natural Environment White Paper⁶² published in June 2011 highlighted that access to nearby attractive public green space and footpaths is likely to increase levels of walking and highlights that good access to greenspace (perceived or actual) makes people 24% more likely to be physically active; helping to tackle obesity. The UK National Ecosystem Assessment⁶³ identified that if every household in England was provided with good access to quality greenspace it could save an estimated £2.1billion in health care costs.

⁶⁰ Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Our strategy for public health in England, builds on Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS.

⁶¹ Government Department for Science, Tackling Obesities: Future Choices – Modelling Future Trends in Obesity and their Impact on Health, 2nd Edition

⁶² www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/

⁶³ UK National Ecosystem Assessment: Technical Report. UNEP-WCMC Cambridge 2011.

The value of walking to reduce the economic impact of obesity and ill health can also be demonstrated through the cost benefit analysis of the 'Walking for Health Scheme which found that it could save the NHS £81 million nationally and yielded a cost benefit ratio of 1:7.⁶⁴ Highlighting the impact that each Park and area of green space could have on health and the economy, William Bird⁶⁵ estimated that an urban park in Portsmouth providing the venue for 20% of total local physical activity could annually save the economy £4.4 million, including £910,000 to the NHS.

6.3.4 Healthy Spaces... as Play Spaces

The Central Bedfordshire Children and Young People's Plan recognises that "contact with nature, access to the countryside and outdoor activities, play, sport and leisure all have significant and beneficial impacts on families, children and young people." Several of the 18 identified Priorities, and associated Strategic Actions, have an existing or potential relationship with Countryside Access including priority 4 - supporting children and young people to lead healthy lifestyles including increasing physical activity (ECM outcome 1 – Be Healthy).

A key priority of the Healthier Communities strategy is 'ensuring a healthy start to life' which aims to reduce childhood obesity through an increase in levels of active play. Increasing access to the natural environment can play a vital role in efforts to increase activity and reduce obesity. Being outdoors is the most powerful correlate of physical activity, particularly in pre-school children³² and improving levels of accessible urban green spaces is associated with increased amounts of play for local children.

6.3.5 Healthy Spaces... as Partnership Spaces

From April 2013, Directors of Public Health will be employed by local authorities and will be ideally placed to influence local services. There are clear opportunities for joining up activity relating to both health and countryside access to connect people with nature for the benefit of public health.

DEFRA are also urging Local Nature Partnerships⁶⁶ and Health and Wellbeing Boards to actively seek to engage each other in their work. Forthcoming guidance will make clear that the wider determinants of health, including the natural

⁶⁴ Health and Natural Environments- An Evidence Based Information Pack, Natural England March 2012

⁶⁵ Natural Fit, Dr William Bird, 2004,

⁶⁶ These partnerships work at a strategic scale to improve the range of benefits and services we get from a healthy natural environment and from good management of the land

environment, will be a crucial consideration in developing joint strategic needs assessments and joint health and wellbeing strategies.

6.4 Healthy Spaces: The Next 10 Years

Partnerships

The council will develop strong partnerships with public health teams and local GP practitioners to investigate how more people can realise the benefits that exercise in the countryside can offer to their overall health and well-being.

The council will seek to ensure that the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and other key documents will reflect the importance of the countryside to public health and addressing health inequalities.

Physical Activity

The council will continue to promote the health benefits of volunteering through the P3 scheme and work to increase the number of volunteers working within Central Bedfordshire.

The development of a 'Simply Cycle' programme (a sister scheme to Simply Walking) will promote cycling as a sustainable, healthy and new way of exploring the countryside of Central Bedfordshire. The council will continue to support and seek opportunities to develop the Simply Walking and Simply Cycle schemes.

The council will seek to develop partnerships with running clubs to promote the use of Rights of Way and sites for recreational running.

The Authority will seek to extend Central Bedfordshire Health Walks programme and develop a network of 1 mile exercise walks as part of walk 4 life NHS programme, seeking to ensure that every community has a route

The council will seek to develop and promote a range of adult fitness initiatives on our countryside sites including orienteering Courses and exercise programmes and events e.g. military fitness and single track trail run. Furthermore we will support a pilot by the National Trust to install outdoor gym equipment on sites and look to extend this if positively evaluated.

The council will increase opportunities for natural play through events and facilities at countryside sites.

6.5 Action Plan Summary for Healthy Spaces

The main Aims and Outcomes of the Action Plan for Healthy Spaces are detailed below. The specific projects relating to these aims are laid out in detail in the Action Plan which will be reviewed and updated every 5 years.

Aim 12 – Countryside Spaces and Rights of Way will facilitate play, health, well being and physical activities

Outcome – Strategies and new delivery partners will recognise the positive and cost effective role that that countryside access plays in the health and wellbeing of the population

Outcome – Countryside Access will be a place to play and enjoy, with children and young people, rediscovering and appreciating the natural environment

Outcome – Activities and events that promote Health and Physical Activity on countryside sites will promote the use of the wider landscape

6.6 Policies for Healthy Spaces

The policies for Healthy Spaces will support the delivery plan but also ensure that the council, its partners and the wider community deliver outdoor and countryside access in line with agreed principles.

OAIP - Policy Statement 13 – Provision of Local Greenspace

The council will seek opportunities to increase provision of local greenspaces (at the 2Ha / 300m level of Accessible Natural Greenspace Targets) in areas with identified public health issues that could be improved through better access to greenspaces and in line with priorities set out in the Leisure Strategy.

OAIP - Policy Statement 14 – Promotion of Health Benefits

The council will promote the associated health benefits related to public use of Rights of Way and greenspaces and will seek to develop programs of activity (e.g. Health Walks, Nordic Walking and practical volunteering) to encourage greater public use of these facilities, particularly in areas of socio-economic disadvantage.

OAIP - Policy Statement 15 – Leaflets

The council will ensure that all countryside, greenspace and rights of way leaflets and interpretation will carry health information, linked to the benefits of exercise in the natural environment

OAIP - Policy Statement 16 – Public Health

The council will work to ensure that opportunities to integrate countryside access with public health are taken, seeking to influence the public health agenda and gain recognition of the impact of countryside access on reducing obesity, increasing exercise and preserving health.

OAIP - Policy Statement 17 – Play

The council will continue to develop and promote the use of formal and natural play facilities on countryside sites.

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Growing Spaces: Countryside and Growth

...sustaining our new communities



7 Growing Spaces: Countryside and Growth

.....sustaining our new communities

Our natural environment is essential to our wellbeing, and it can be better looked after than it has been. Habitats that have been degraded can be restored. Species that have been isolated can be reconnected. Green Belt land that has been depleted of diversity can be refilled by nature – and opened to people to experience it, to the benefit of body and soul.

Rt Hon Greg Clark MP (Foreword to the NPPF).

7.1 What are Growing Spaces?

Growing Spaces are growth areas; those areas of Central Bedfordshire that are expanding and having to deal with the challenges of growth and development generally. This growth includes new areas of housing, employment and all associated infrastructure including greenspaces and access routes.

7.1.1 The Development Strategy

The Development Strategy is the main planning document for Central Bedfordshire sets out the overarching spatial strategy and development principles for the area. It sets out the strategic objectives for the area and identifies the scale of new employment, housing and retail provision and the location of large scale development sites The Strategy also identifies the new infrastructure required to support this development, and identify the key environmental constraints and opportunities.

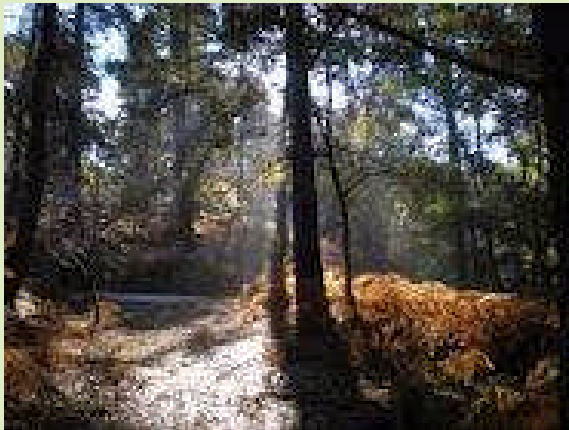
With increased mobility and more people participating in sporting and recreational activities in their leisure time, the provision of accessible open space, recreation and leisure facilities is assuming greater importance. At the same time, large numbers of new houses are proposed to be built across Central Bedfordshire during the Plan period. The residents of these new homes will create additional demand for, and pressures on, open space and countryside access.

This OAIP covers a wide range of sites and facilities which fit into a hierarchy of open space provision, ranging from local green spaces to community woodlands through to country parks. The council recognises the value that people place on the

countryside and will protect the open countryside for its own intrinsic value and for the wider benefits it provides. It will also safeguard landscapes against inappropriate development and strive to ensure new development works with the landscape.

The enhancement of the open space network, as the population of Central Bedfordshire and surrounding areas grows, is an important factor in maintaining residents' quality of life. The council will therefore protect existing green space and provide new green space accessible to the public. The maintenance of the existing and new open space provision is also important and the council will seek contributions to secure the long term management of sites. The policy relating to the quality and quantity standards of open space, that needs to be provided through growth and development, will be set out in the council's Leisure Strategy. Planners and developers have seen the benefits of incorporating green space within residential developments for many years. It has recently been demonstrated that properties close to green space command a premium of between 5 -15%⁶⁷.

CASE STUDY – RUSHMERE COUNTRY PARK



In 2009 Central Bedfordshire Council and the Greensand Trust formed a partnership to purchase Rushmere Park, using funding from a variety of sources including a grant of £573,000 from the Department of Communities and Local Government.

Rushmere Park - 85 hectares (210 acres), was a privately owned estate,

located adjacent to Stockgrove Country Park and Oak Wood, already owned by the council and Greensand Trust respectively. The purchase facilitated the creation of a 162 hectare (400 acre) public open space for future generations to enjoy; **Rushmere Country Park** is an exciting and diverse site with a mix of landscapes, habitats and opportunities for people explore. Since 2009 extensive planning work has been carried out and works include the creation of new facilities, routes, biodiversity enhancements and a sculpture trail.

⁶⁷ Green Infrastructure by Design - a guide for sustainable communities in Milton Keynes and South Midlands (2010) – original date provided by Natural England.

7.1.2 Minerals and Waste

The Minerals and Waste Local Plan, due to be adopted Summer 2013, will comprise a joint policy document covering Central Bedfordshire, Bedford Borough and Luton. The Plan sets out strategic objectives for minerals and waste issues within the Plan area and identifies strategic sites for both mineral extraction and waste management (including waste disposal and waste recovery capacity) for the period up to 2028. It includes policies which will be used to determine planning applications for mineral extraction and waste management development. The plan seeks improvements in terms of biodiversity, green infrastructure and countryside access and therefore is strategically important to the aims and objectives of the OAIP.

Whilst during the operational life of mineral extraction and waste disposal sites there is often a dramatic impact on countryside access and disruption for users of the rights of way network due the need to introduce temporary diversions or closures which may last a number of years, the established policy approach is to at least reinstate the pre-existing access arrangements once a site is restored and, whenever possible, provide enhanced access opportunities. Minerals and waste sites provide opportunities to add significantly to the greenspace network. In some sites it is possible to reinstate paths during phased working and this practice should be promoted.

The OAIP will look to inform the minerals and waste planning process and influence the design and delivery of restoration schemes in order to improve access to the countryside. The council will produce design standards and specifications which will shape how restoration schemes provide enhanced countryside access opportunities.

7.1.3 Provision of Infrastructure

Infrastructure means the facilities and services that help us live our everyday lives. It can range from strategic provision, such as a new roads or schools, to the creation of new parks, woodlands and access routes. Providing the appropriate level of environmental infrastructure is crucial to delivering healthy and sustainable communities.

7.1.4 Community Infrastructure Levy

The development industry will be funding a substantial proportion of the new infrastructure, outdoor access and greenspace. This will occur through either the usual agreements made in the course of individual planning applications (known as S106 Planning Agreements) or the emerging Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), a tariff based charge.

The council is working on its CIL charging schedule, which will propose the rate that it intends to charge for residential and commercial development. Once the charge is adopted the council will produce a list of infrastructure items on which CIL revenues will be spent. This list will be based on the infrastructure schedule in the Development Strategy which includes greenspaces needed as part of the infrastructure required to support new development. There will be further opportunities to strengthen links with local council's through the CIL process.

7.1.5 The Leisure Strategy

The emerging Leisure Strategy will address the current mismatch of leisure provision. This work will include an audit of built facilities and open space provision across Central Bedfordshire. Through the audits and assessments, individual Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) will be developed for Chapters 1 to 3. These will identify locally specific standards which, once adopted, will be used to deliver leisure and open space facilities in new developments once adopted. It will also be used to inform and update S106 and CIL contributions. The emerging Leisure Strategy SPD will have regard to the Outdoor Access Improvement Plan and Local Green Infrastructure Plans.

The Leisure Strategy will comprise the following chapters:

- Chapter 1: Leisure Facilities Strategy, focusing on indoor sport and leisure centres, comprising a range of sport and leisure facilities
- Chapter 2: Recreation and Open Space Strategy, focusing on a defined range of green spaces, providing formal and informal recreational and play facilities
- Chapter 3: Playing Pitch Strategy, focusing on outdoor formal, grass and artificially-surfaced sports playing pitches
- Chapter 4: Physical Activity Strategy, focusing on all types of physical activity - classes, sports, exercise, walking etc. and will include an activity programme

There will be an overarching Leisure Strategy document to provide an overview of the detailed information contained within the four chapters and will identify linkages between the chapters, partner organisations' work and the council's strategic approach to leisure.

7.1.6 Green Infrastructure

BOX 5 GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE FUNCTIONS

GI performs a variety of functions at all spatial scales, from individual sites within urban centres through to the landscape scale in the wider countryside. GI can deliver a wide range of benefits for society through the range of functions or services it can fulfil, such as:

- Landscape setting and context for development
- Habitat provision and access to nature
- Access, recreation, movement and leisure
- Energy production and conservation
- Food production and productive landscapes
- Flood attenuation and water resource management
- Countering the 'heat island' effect of urban areas

Source: Adapted from Green Infrastructure Guidance, Natural England (2009)

Designing Green Infrastructure into new developments means that the new development becomes an attractive, sustainable place. The GI network includes publicly accessible green spaces that are highly valued by local communities and visitors. The Leisure Strategy will define a hierarchy of publicly accessible green spaces. The council will protect these sites and take

opportunities to promote their improvement through, for instance, proper management. This will be achieved through the invaluable work of local groups and communities and additional funding will be sought through planning obligations, where it is required, to ensure GI is delivered. Whilst development in the GI priority areas may be expected it, should not fragment the existing or proposed GI network or build over key GI opportunity sites.

The council will promote the Design Guide requirement that GI is considered from the earliest preparatory phases of the (development) masterplanning process⁶⁸, rather than as an afterthought or add on. Ideally, this should happen as part of the initial strategic thinking and research carried out by a developer to define needs, objectives and the key parameters for the development.

⁶⁸ A separate process to Greenspace Masterplanning as referred to elsewhere in the OAIP

Incorporating GI into the masterplan at the start allows the developer / design team to think about what type, and how much GI, is actually required, how it compliments and relates to the existing GI and how it can be integrated to create multi-functionality. This early consideration of GI allows the developer to meet many of the statutory requirements within a development scheme whilst benefiting many other social, economic and environmental objectives.⁶⁹

7.1.7 Local Green Space

The National Planning Policy Framework introduced a new landscape designation known as Local Green Space. The designation, which can be made through Neighbourhood Plans and reviews of the Development Strategy, will allow protection of valued local areas from new development other than in exceptional circumstances. The land to be designated must be demonstrably special to a local community and hold a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and must be local in scale and in reasonably close proximity to the community. However, it will normally be located beyond the Settlement Envelope because valuable open space within the settlement will be designated as Important Open Space.

Local Green Space, once designated, is subject to the same strong development restrictions as Green Belt. Because of this the council would not normally expect Local Green Space to be designated within the Green Belt.

⁶⁹ G.I. Design Guide 2010

7.2 Why are Growing Spaces Important?

Greenspace and access provision should be an integral aspect of, and can add value to, the 'place-making' and development process⁷⁰. The incorporation of high quality, sustainable and multifunctional greenspace can provide a range of economic, environmental and social functions (or services) that are essential in creating and sustaining well-designed places for living, work and play. This applies equally to regeneration of urban areas and new sustainable urban extensions.

Greenspaces and countryside sites perform a variety of functions from individual small greenspaces within urban centres through to the landscape scale in the wider countryside.

There is increasing evidence to support the economic case for greenspaces which demonstrates that investment in them makes good business sense for developers.

High-quality green space has a significant impact on the economic life of urban centres⁷¹. The presence of good parks and greenspaces offers a vital economic lever to first attract and then retain new businesses.

Attractive green space also offers very clear benefits to the local economy in terms of stimulating increased house prices, since house-buyers are willing to pay a premium to be near green space.

Many areas are also now seeing that the redevelopment of high-quality public green spaces aids the regeneration of an area, with commercial and residential property prices increasing in those locations. A study in the North West of England showed proximity to city parks was found to augment property prices by nearly 20% for a detached property⁷².

⁷⁰ Chris Blandford Associates (March 2010). MKSM Green Infrastructure by Design: A guide for sustainable communities in Milton Keynes South Midlands

⁷¹ Blue Sky Green Space (2010) Understanding the Contribution Parks and Green Spaces can make to Improving People's Lives.

⁷² Neill Dunse (2007). Urban parks, open space and residential property values, RICS.

7.3 Growing Spaces: The Next 10 Years

Leisure Strategy

The OAIP will support the Leisure Strategy for the Central Bedfordshire area which will develop open space quality and quantity standards.

In support of the delivery of the Leisure Strategy, the council will monitor planning applications to ensure that the quality and quantity of green space provision meets agreed standards.

New countryside sites in areas identified in the Leisure Strategy and the Green Infrastructure Plan will be developed to meet deficits in the location and types of sites available.

Sites will be categorised and a clear vision developed for the standards of management and future development of each site. This is linked to supporting the implementation of the Leisure Strategy.

Planning for Outdoor Access

The council will ensure that individual development proposals and planning policy continue to offer protection of and enhancements to outdoor access.

Outdoor access will need to be considered in a wide range of applications from individual homeowner applications, minerals and waste applications and major housing developments. All types of applications should seek net enhancements to public access to the countryside.

Outdoor access principles should continue to be a key influence on wider masterplanning and 'Place Making' exercises that the council is undertaking. Early inclusion in the planning process is a key factor in ensuring countryside access is an integral part of any sustainable development.

The council will formulate planning policies, which relate to Countryside Access, Rights of Way and Green Space including Neighbourhood Plans.

The council will seek enhancements to the existing greenspace and rights of way network from development applications and proposals.

The council will work with local communities on the development of Greenspace, Access and Neighbourhood Plans.

Research

Studies will be undertaken with an academic partner into the development of a model that can predict the expected use of countryside facilities from new development.

Improving Sites and Facilities

A review of council and partnership landholdings will be undertaken to identify adjacent land that could be justifiably acquired to consolidate existing landholdings, and widen the activities that each site can offer.

The council will enhance existing and create new facilities on site, e.g. trails, litter/waste bins, toilets, play facilities, car parking, visitor centres to cater for increased use in line with Leisure strategy standards and user / non user demands.

Supporting Strategic Projects and Initiatives

The council will continue to support those projects which require a multi agency partnership approach to facilitate the delivery.

One such strategic project is The Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway (B&MKW). The B&MKW Trust was established in 1995 to promote the development of a broad waterway which will link the Grand Union Canal in Milton Keynes to the river Great Ouse in Bedford through a series of Waterway Parks. The Trust works with some 26 partners drawn from national and regional authorities and voluntary organisations.

7.4 Action Plan Summary for Growing Spaces

The main Aim and Outcome of the Action Plan for Growing Spaces is detailed below. The specific projects relating to these aims are laid out in detail in the Action Plan which will be reviewed and updated every 5 years.

Aim 13 – The quantity and quality of rights of way and greenspaces meet the needs of current and future communities

Outcome – We will understand the needs of users and non users and the role that the site and access routes play in the green infrastructure network. This will steer our future management and site development.

Outcome – New sites will be established and existing sites enhanced to meet the demands of increased housing

7.5 Policies for Growing Spaces

The policies for Growing Spaces will support the delivery plan but also ensure that the council, its partners and the wider community deliver outdoor and countryside access in line with agreed principles.

OAIP - Policy Statement 18 – Planning

The council will seek to ensure that new development proposals and planning policies should reflect the aims of the OAIP and Leisure Strategy, ensuring that development proposals deliver OAIP aims and outcomes in the Action Plan.

The council will seek to ensure that development proposals enhance the rights of way and access network and contributions will be sought towards developing the network.

The council will seek to ensure that development proposals enhance the network of countryside sites and greenspaces and contributions will be sought towards the safeguarding and enhancement of existing greenspaces

The council will seek to ensure that new Minerals and Waste policies and proposals reflect the aims of the OAIP and specifically the projects and programmes identified in the action plan.

The council will provide design guidance and specifications for access routes and greenspace and will seek to ensure that the relevant guidance is applied to development proposals – including minerals and waste schemes.

OAIP - Policy Statement 19 – Green Infrastructure

The council will seek to ensure that development proposals deliver access and greenspace proposals identified within Green Infrastructure Plans and work within the Green Infrastructure priority network to enhance the network of rights of way, access and greenspace.

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Action Plan

2013-2023



8 Action Plan

2013-2023

The OAIP Action Plan is a initial 10 year programme of activity to improve access to the countryside of Central Bedfordshire, predominately steering the work of the Countryside Access Service, who will produce and manage a rolling 5 year business plan to detail and deliver this plans actions. The Action Plan will be reviewed and updated in 2018, 2023 and 2028 to cover the full period of the Outdoor Access Improvement Plan (OAIP).

This is a Central Bedfordshire led plan; however, the community and the council's partners will help deliver the plan over the period. The council already works with a range of partners and will continue to develop these links over the period of the plan to ensure its delivery.

8.1 Structure of the Action Plan

The action plan has been structured into 5 sections:

- Connecting Spaces: Rights of Way
...taking you through the landscape
- Breathing Spaces: Sites and Greenspaces
...oases of calm at the heart of your community
- Local Spaces: Community Involvement and Participation
...the green space on our doorstep
- Healthy Spaces: Health and Wellbeing
...which encourage us to get active
- Growing Spaces: The Countryside and Growth
...sustaining our communities

The Action Plan has been structured with resourcing as a fundamental consideration. The Action Plan will look to provide value for money high quality services whilst being realistic about what can be achieved over the timeframe given the resourcing constraints. However, the plan is not limited to what can be achieved with the

resources that are currently available, but will also look at what can be achieved by developing new ways of working and exploring new and creative funding streams.

The Action Plan will highlight the timescales for the particular work streams, outputs and projects (collectively referred to as ‘deliverables’) and will identify the required level of resourcing. Resources cover both staff allocation and delivery costs of the actions and have been based on revenue and capital allocation available at the time of writing.

The timescales for delivery will be divided as follows:

Short	Medium	Long Term
0 – 5 years	5 – 10 years	10 years +

Projects will be started within the delivery timescales and, in most instances, completed within the 5 year periods to tie in with the 5 year cycle of the action plans. There will be instances where projects are started and fall over a number of action plan reporting periods – particularly in relation to long term projects.

The Action Plan identifies the level of resourcing required for each project or activity in the following manner:

Key	Resource Level	Resource Implications
£	Level 1	Projects that can be delivered within existing resources (both staffing and budgets).
££	Level 2	Projects requiring small levels of extra resourcing – including staffing, financial, or increased partnership working.
£££	Level 3	Projects that can only be delivered through finding and securing of significant new resources.

8.1.1 The Countryside Access Service

The Countryside Access Service is the team responsible for the development, management and delivery of the Outdoor Access Improvement Plan. It manages the rights of way network, the councils countryside sites and programmes that engage with over 600 volunteers. This skilled, experienced team of professionals are charged with a complex and diverse range of duties and challenges including legal matters (i.e. enforcement and prosecution), contract management, maintenance and construction of infrastructure, dealing with planning and growth, liaising with local council's and communities, project management and fundraising.

8.2 Flagship Projects

In addition to the actions we have identified in the action plan, five projects have been identified that will provide significant benefits to Central Bedfordshire, extending the focus and challenging the work of the council. Four of the projects are thematic in nature; the other project relates to a specific site offering considerable potential for development for community benefit. The scale of this site based project leads to its inclusion as a flagship project.

8.2.1 Heath and Wellbeing Development

Seek to develop a walking and physical activity programme, promoting the benefits of the natural environment on stress, blood pressure reduction and the benefits of cheap and accessible exercise. This would support the existing Health Walks partnership and should seek to develop linkages with Nordic Walking, Walking and Running Clubs, orienteering and practical volunteering such as Volunteer Green Exercise Programmes. This will be in line with the Leisure Strategy Physical Activity Strategy.

8.2.2 Greenspace Master Planning and Accessible Landscapes

The council will identify a number of defined priority landscapes. It will work to improve the quality of access, interpretation and information on these landscapes and promote them as places to visit in their own right. This project would provide links to engaging people with the landscape on their doorstep, improving accessibility of structures, destination signage, running events and guided walks. It could also possibly increase maintenance quality through the active direction of volunteers and community payback personnel.

8.2.3 Bridleway Connectivity

The council will undertake a study in partnership with Sustrans and The British Horse Society to identify the most important missing links in the Bridleway Network. It will seek to deliver new links and connections to both improve connectivity and safety of the network. This will benefit both horse riders and cyclists.

8.2.4 Houghton Hall Park

The 'Renaissance and Renewal' project has been created to restore Houghton Hall Park to its former glory. User and non-user surveys show that the site is not well known or used and that people are unaware of the importance of the site to Houghton Regis. External funding will be sought to fund improved visitor facilities as well as heritage restoration works, interpretation, promotion and a programme of activities to encourage greater interest in and use of the park.

8.2.5 Dogs in the Countryside

A project will be established to look at the range of people / dog management issues. This will include dog fouling, conflicts with other users, conflicts with livestock, disturbance to wildlife and damage to sensitive habitats. The project will work with partners to develop positive relationships with dog owners and promote consistent messages for countryside sites and rights of way across CBC and potentially adjoining areas.

8.3 Action Plan

Connecting Spaces ... taking you through the landscape

Aim 1 – A Well Maintained Network

Outcome 1 – Rights of Way to be available and unobstructed

Ref N ^o	Deliverable	Measure	Baseline	Target	Resources	Timescale	Partners
1.1.1	Create a regular volunteer programme to survey paths enabling communities to identify their priorities.	No. of parishes surveyed	10 /78 parishes	All parishes surveyed every 5 years	£	Short	GST, BRCC
1.1.2	Create a Maintenance Policy that outlines standards for path maintenance. Assess the network against these standards and establish a works programme to ensure paths meet standards.	% paths meeting policy standards	70% meet standards	90% meet standards by 2017	££	Medium	Not applicable
1.1.3	FLAGSHIP PROJECT: Establish a new partnership / initiative to raise awareness with Dog Owners about dog control and fouling issues, reducing the affect on the public of these issues.	Appropriate measures to be determined in first phase of project	to be determined when measures are set	to be determined when measures are set	££	Short	NT, GST,WT, HRTC, FMV, LBC, BRCC

Outcome 2 – Rights of Way to be signed from the road and waymarked as necessary

1.2.1	Establish a new programme of winter gap and signage clearance to ensure that major growth is cut back over the winter.	No. of gaps and signposts cleared	Pilot of 35 locations cleared in 2012	All gaps and signposts cleared every 5 years	££	Short	Not applicable
1.2.2	Establish a signage programme, working with local communities to identify paths that would benefit from distance and destination detail on fingerposts.	No of posts installed per annum	30 pa	40 pa	££	Short	Not applicable
1.2.3	Paths on urban fringe waymarked so that users don't require maps.	No of urban fringe paths waymarked	70% meet standards	90% meet standards by 2017	££	Short	Not applicable
1.2.4	Waymarking of paths incorporated into regular surveying. Volunteers trained and then encouraged to monitor and replace waymark discs in their local area.	Number of parishes waymarked by volunteers	10 /78 parishes	78 every 5 years	£	Medium	Not applicable

Aim1 - Quality Measures

	Ease of use [BVPI178 criteria]		72%	Sustain and increase for next 5 years. Target 75%	£	Ongoing	
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Aim 2 – A Better Defined and Recorded Network

Outcome 1 – All Public Rights of Way to be legally recorded by the 2026 DEFRA deadline

Ref N ^o	Deliverable	Measure	Baseline	Target	Resources	Timescale	Partners
2.1.1	Increase the resolution of anomalies per annum	Number of anomalies resolved	10 per year	20 per year to order making stage	££	Ongoing	Not applicable
2.1.2	Process Town and Country Planning Act (TCPA) applications within 4 months of receipt	Number of TCPA applications processed within deadline	100%	Maintain at 100%	£	Ongoing	Not applicable

Connecting Spaces ... taking you through the landscape

2.1.3	Improve the Council's performance in determining 'Definitive Map Modification Orders' (DMMOs) within 12 months. Reduce receipt back log	Number of DMMOs in backlog	10	0 DMMO over 12 months old in waiting list	££	Short	Not applicable
2.1.4	Improve the Council's performance on Public Path Orders (PPO) determination to less than 12 months	Number of PPOs in backlog	6	0 PPO over 12 months old in waiting list	££	Long	Not applicable
2.1.5	Check that all rights of way are recorded on the definitive map. Establish a 'Lost Ways' project that uses volunteers to undertake historical research.	% of parishes reviewed for Lost Ways	0	100% by 2024	££	Long	Not applicable
2.1.6	Consolidate the Definitive Map and Statement every 3 years	Complete Consolidation occurson 3 yearly cycle	Not applicable	Two consolidation cycles by end of Action Plan	£	Long	Not applicable

Outcome 2 – Definitive Maps are created for the Excluded areas of Biggleswade and Dunstable

2.2.1	In line with the Excluded Area Strategy, investigate, map and record rights of way within Dunstable and create a new or add to the existing Definitive Map	DM for excluded area	No PROW in area	Excluded areas resolved	££	Medium	Not applicable
2.2.2	In line with the Excluded Area Strategy, investigate, map and record rights of way within Biggleswade and create a new or add to the existing Definitive Map	DM for excluded area	No PROW in area	Excluded areas resolved	££	Medium	Not applicable

Aim 3 – A well connected network

Outcome 1 – Level of connectivity of the public path network is increased

Ref N ^o	Deliverable	Measure	Baseline	Target	Resources	Timescale	Partners
3.1.1	Initially focusing in the Ivel Valley framework area, work with communities to review their local network, GI Planning and local parish / town planning to prioritise local and strategic connectivity issues	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	££	Short-Long	BRCC
3.1.2	Working with communities seek to identify the path network that provides access to schools, facilities, transport hubs and key visitor destinations– for incorporation into the Local Area Transport Plan [LATP]	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	£	Medium	Town/ Parish Councils, Community groups, schools, attractions
3.1.3	Review public rights of way road and rail crossings. Undertake public use and evidence analysis to identify critical crossing locations and propose improvements as part of future LATP programs	No of crossings reviewed	1	4 pa	££	Long	NR, as appropriate
3.1.4	Undertake assessment, and where necessary improve, Greensand Ridge walk / ride, the Kingfisher Way and the Icknield Way path and Trail, to reduce dangerous crossings and road sections	No of crossings improved	0	10	££	Short	GST, BRCC, IWA, GSRW Steering Group

Outcome 2 – Bridleway connectivity is increased

3.2.1	Produce a plan to increase bridleway connectivity in south west Central Bedfordshire - working with Cycling and Horse riding communities to propose and deliver new network links	% km squares with good bridleway connectivity	Baseline required	Dependent on baseline	£££	Medium	BHS
3.2.2	Produce a plan to increase bridleway connectivity in east Central Bedfordshire - working with Cycling and Horse riding communities to propose and deliver new network links	% km squares with good bridleway connectivity	Baseline Required	Dependent on baseline	£££	Short	BRCC

Connecting Spaces ... taking you through the landscape

Outcome 3 - Further severance of the network is minimised

3.3.1	Develop a connectivity policy to protect the network from severance and unacceptable mitigation / diversion levels.	% km squared of whole network with good level of connectivity	Baseline created from policy	Dependent on baseline	£	Medium	As appropriate
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Aim 4 – A more accessible network of routes

Outcome 1 – Public Rights of Way will be more accessible to users

Ref N ^o	Deliverable	Measure	Baseline	Target	Resources	Timescale	Partners
4.1.1	Promoted walks promoted by the Council should be stile free and have distance/destination signposting	% of promoted routes that are stile free and have distance and destination signage	80%	100%	££	Short	Communities , walking groups
4.1.2	Review and update the Least Restrictive Access policy. Use this to develop a matrix which ensures that the network is as accessible as possible	Length of network by parish between structures [especially stiles]	Original policy	Policy reviewed and in use by 2014	£	Short	As appropriate
4.1.3	Create seating and resting points on frequently used urban fringe paths and promoted routes	No of seats and resting points created	0	5 pa	££	Long	Communities , Town and Parish Councils
4.1.4	Work with local communities to identify internal paths that can be surfaced to improve accessibility to amenities, village hall, church, view point or historic feature. Seek to include these within the LATP process	% of paths surfaced	Baseline needs establishing	Dependent on baseline	£££	Long	Communities , Town and Parish Councils
4.1.5	Reduce the number of restrictive structures on the network; seek to remove structures no longer needed for stock management and upgrade stiles to gaps or gates.	% of network that is stile free	91%	95%	££	Medium	Communities , Town and Parish Councils
4.1.6	Create public art at key locations on the Greensand Ridge Walk and other promoted routes to reflect local community or heritage and to enhance the environment.	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	£££	Long	GSRWSG, arts organisations, others as appropriate

Breathing Spaces... oases of calm at the heart of your community

Aim 5 – Well managed Countryside Spaces							
Outcome 1 – Countryside sites will be managed to a good state of repair, with visitors understanding the sites and their management and having regard to the intrinsic qualities of the landscape							
Ref N°	Deliverable	Measure	Baseline	Target	Resources	Timescale	Partners
5.1.1	All Level 1 and 2 Countryside sites will have an up to date management and development plan. The local community will be involved in the development of these plans and information will be accessible to them on the plans and their implementation	% Countryside Sites with Management Plans (up-to date)	17 Management Plans in place	100% by 2015	£	Short	NT, GST
5.1.2	All Level 3 and 4 Countryside sites will have an up to date management plan/ statement. The local community will be involved in the development of plans for sites with public access and information will be accessible to them on the plans and their implementation	% Countryside Sites with Management Plans (up-to date)	0 Management Plans/Statements in place	100% by 2017	£	Medium	NT, GST,WT, ST, BRCC
5.1.3	Welcome signage and/or interpretation will familiarise people with the site, its management, who is responsible and will encourage people to explore and discover	No of sites with signage	Signage and interpretation exists at 30 sites	Signage and interpretation at 50 sites by 2018	££	Medium	NT, GST,WT, ST, BRCC
5.1.4	FLAGSHIP PROJECT - Develop a new initiative to target Dog fouling, dog control and on site litter	Appropriate measures to be determined in first phase of project	to be determined when measures are set	to be determined when measures are set	££	Short	NT, GST,WT, MV, LBC, BRCC
5.1.5	Establish new systems to record and manage the countryside sites tree inspections. Seek to improve work programming and health and safety management.	% tree inspections recorded	0%	100%	££	Short	NT, GST,WT, ST, BRCC
5.1.6	Undertake a review of the management of our SSSI's and County Wildlife Stites to establish new guidelines for the management of the Council's sites. All council sites will be managed to achieve favourable/favourable recovering condition status.	SSSI Total – Condition level	6 sites favourable/favourable recovering. 1 site unfavourable	7 sites favourable/favourable recovering	££	Medium	NT,GST,WT, BRCC
5.1.7	Undertake a review of the management of ancient monuments on the Council's countryside sites and ensure Management and Development Plans cover the protection, maintenance and promotion of these sites.	No of ancient monument sites with Management Plans	1 plan	4 plans	£	Medium	NT,EH, BRCC
5.1.8	Seek to implement and operate control measures to reduce anti social behaviour, regulate access and alleviate nuisances, on countryside sites and rights of way in order to ensure that all enjoy their visit	% of complaints addressed	baseline data to be established in 2013	dependent on baseline	£	Short	Community Police, NT, GST,WT, ST, BRCC
5.1.9	FLAGSHIP PROJECT - Develop improved visitor facilities for Houghton Hall Park	% of users rating site as Good or Excellent	Baseline Survey taking place 2013	Dependent on baseline survey	£££	Medium	GST, HRTC, HRHG, community
Outcome 2 – Visitors will know the location of their nearest space and be aware of their travel choices							
5.2.1	Travel plans will be developed for our category 1 sites, ensuring that local people are aware and confident to access the sites by walking, cycling and other sustainable methods (e.g. car share).	% sites with travel plans	2	5	££	Long	NT, GST,WT, HRTC, ST
Outcome 3 - Existing sites will be enhanced to meet the demands of local communities and the growth agenda							
5.3.1	A review of existing landholdings will be undertaken with the view of identifying adjacent land that could be justifiably acquired to consolidate existing landholdings, and widen the activities that each site offers.	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	£££	Medium	As appropriate
5.3.2	Enhance existing and create new facilities on site, e.g. trails, litter/waste bins, toilets, play facilities, public art, car parking, visitor centres to cater for increased use - in line with Leisure strategy standards and user / nonuser demands	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	££ / £££	Long	As appropriate

Aim 6 – Commons, Village Greens and Access Areas will be legally defined with people understanding their rights

Outcome 1 – People will know where their nearest Common, Village Green and Access Area is and are confident of how they can use them.

Ref N ^o	Deliverable	Measure	Baseline	Target	Resources	Timescale	Partners
6.1.1	Work with local communities to promote existing Commons	% of Commons with enhanced information	60%	100%	££	Medium	PC/TC
6.1.2	Maintain the register of commons and village greens, increasing availability of access and web accessibility	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	££	Ongoing	Not applicable
6.1.3	In line with government legislation facilitate communities to register new Village Greens	No of village green applications	No applications received in 2012	100% of applications processed within 12 months	££	Long	PC/TC
6.1.4	Ensure that all open access areas are clearly signed and promoted and where appropriate covered by byelaws	% Open Access areas signed appropriately	100%	100% maintained	£	Ongoing	NT, WT, BRCC
6.1.5	Manage and promote open access areas in CBC ownership or under a scheme of management in accordance with Aim 5	% of open access areas with enhanced information	50%	100%	££	Medium	NT, GST, BRCC

Local Spaces... the greenspace on your doorstep

Aim 7 – More people volunteering							
Outcome 1 – More people will be aware and taking opportunities to volunteer on the environmental initiatives in their area							
Ref' N°	Deliverable	Measure	Baseline	Target	Resources	Timescale	Partners
7.1.1	The People Projects Partnership (P3) scheme will continue to be resourced, supported and developed. There will be an increase in community volunteers within existing P3 groups and in the number and range of activities in the scheme	No of P3 groups	36	40	£	Short	BRCC, GST
7.1.2	The skills and roles of P3 groups will be extended and diversified.	No of P3 groups skilled in multiple roles	25	39	£	Short	BRCC, GST
7.1.3	P3 groups will be encouraged to work with and organise events with other groups (scouts, guides, WI, Rotary Club, schools etc) to support community cohesion	No of events held with other groups	3	6 annual events by 2017	£	Short	P3, FGs, BRCC, GST
7.1.4	The 'Friends of' programme that is operated through our countryside sites will continue to be resourced, maintained and extended to other sites	No of 'Friends of' groups	20 groups	25 groups by 2017	£	Short	BRCC, GST
7.1.5	A new 'Junior Friends of' scheme will be established – which will seek to develop the interest of young people in the natural environment	No of 'Junior Friends'	Dependent on pilot	Dependent on pilot	££	Medium	P3, FGs, GST, BRCC
7.1.6	Increase the involvement of the Youth Parliament and the Young Inspectors as a mechanism of scoping and facilitating an increase in youth engagement with, and enhancements to, the sites and countryside access.	No of items with YP/YI input	1 pa	3 pa	£	Medium	BRCC, GST
7.1.7	Site management and development plans / statements will clearly identify the tasks that volunteers can support	No of Plans including volunteer roles	0	50%	£	Medium	BRCC, GST
7.1.8	Consult with other groups using volunteers to identify best practice in managing their volunteer base	No of groups consulted	0	15	£	Medium	BRCC, GST
7.1.9	As part of our P3 and 'friends of' initiatives we will establish a regular programme of training called 'Step this way'. This will invest in and support volunteer development.	No. of volunteers trained	6	15	££	Medium	BRCC, GST
7.1.10	Support communities in achieving Green Flag Awards (community awards for their management of Council owned site).	No. of Green Flag Awards	3 current	5 by 2017	£	Short	BRCC, GST, P3, FGs
7.1.11	Following a review of the initial community payback pilot, extend the opportunities for wider contracting	No. of Community Payback Hours	Dependent on pilot	Dependent on pilot	£	Medium	BRCC, GST
Aim 8 – Increased Town and Parish Council involvement in countryside sites and rights of way management and development							
Outcome 1 – Town and Parish Councils have more opportunities to be involved in the management and development of local sites and public path network.							
Ref' N°	Deliverable		Baseline	Target	Resources	Timescale	Partners
8.1.1	Scope the level of involvement that Town and Parish Councils want to have with the management of countryside sites and rights of way. Within resources available seek to adapt delivery to meet community needs.	No. of Town and Parish Councils engaged	0	10	£	Short	Town and Parish Councils

8.1.2	Develop a reporting system for Town and Parish councils and ward members which will review performance and seek discussion and agreement on proposed future work and priorities.	No of Town and Parish Councils receiving report	0	100%	££	Short	Town and Parish Councils
8.1.3	Establish information, guides and training to inform and coach community leaders in issues relating to the management of Rights of Way and Countryside sites, link with the 'Step this way' volunteer training programme.	No of community leaders receiving information/ coaching	0	15	££	Medium	Community groups, Town and Parish Councils
8.1.4	Ensure that Town and Parish Councils are represented on major sites user forums and flagship projects steering groups established on major sites or initiatives	No of Forums with Town and Parish Council representation	2	7	£	Long	Town and Parish Councils

Aim 9 – Countryside Access will contribute to supporting the rural economy

Outcome 1 – Local Businesses have more opportunities to benefit from the development of sites and Rights of Way.

Ref' N°	Deliverable	Measure	Baseline	Target	Resources	Timescale	Partners
9.1.1	Literature supporting promoted walks will show the location of relevant local businesses	% of leaflets showing businesses	0	100%	£	Medium	Local businesses
9.1.2	Ensure that our walks and rides link with and/or start and finish at appropriate local business or community centres.	No of routes that start/ finish from business or community hub	Establish baseline	20	££	Medium	Local businesses

Outcome 2 - Visitor numbers to Central Bedfordshire countryside sites will increase

9.2.1	Seek to work with councils - targeting Greensand Ridge Area as a priority - to replicate the success of Sandy Town Councils bid to become a 'Walkers are Welcome Town'.	No of Councils	1	3	££	Medium	STC, Town and Parish Councils
9.2.2	A range of events showcasing local produce and products, e.g. Farmers Markets, will be held on our countryside sites to encourage a wider range of visitors.	No of events held	1	3	£	Short	BRCC

Outcome 3 - Employment opportunities for the Local Area will be maximised

9.3.1	Endeavour to employ any part-time wardens from the surrounding area subject to the personnel specification being met	% of wardens from local area	Currently major sites managed by partners	Partners encouraged to employ local labour and any new sites developed to make use of local labour resource	£	Long	BRCC, GST, NT, ST
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Aim 10 – More people have access to good quality information and are aware of countryside access close to them

Outcome 1 – People will be able to access information about local sites and promoted routes

Ref' N°	Deliverable	Measure	Baseline	Target	Resources	Timescale	Partners
10.1.1	Maintain and increase the quality of our existing promoted walking and cycling leaflets and work with the British Horse Society to enhance their riding routes , increasing online availability and quality of all routes	100% of leaflets are available in print and online	90%	100%	£	Short	GST/NT/BRCC/FMV
10.1.2	Enhance access to routes and site information through the use of Apps and other online mediums (e.g. QR Codes, GPS etc)	No of routes and sites covered by an app	0	10	££	Long	CBC marketing team
10.1.3	Seek to enhance the provision of online information about local sites and promoted routes, ensuring that we learn from best practice in other areas.	No of routes and sites with online information	10 promoted routes	100%	£	Medium	CBC marketing team
10.1.4	Produce a new general 'walks, rides and places to visit' leaflet for general distribution, that will point to our web site for downloads	No of leaflets distributed	0	3000	££	Medium	GST/NT/BRCC/FMV

10.1.5	Continue to develop routes that promote family cycling and cycle tourism in Central Bedfordshire, working with colleagues and partners to ensure that there is a range for all needs across the area 'Cycle Central'.	No of family routes	6	10	££	Long	Sust. Travel
10.1.6	Continue to support the www.letsgo.org.uk web site that promotes routes and sites in Bedfordshire with links to accommodation providers and other related information	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	£	Ongoing	FMV
10.1.7	Seek to identify more accessible routes that can facilitate access for family groups with push chairs and people with limited mobility. Promote via our online access trails	No of new accessibility routes created	0	10	££	Long	GST/NT/BRCC/FMV
10.1.8	Seek to improve information, branding and awareness of the Greensand Ridge Walk and Cycle Route	Greensand Ridge User Survey - 'how did you hear about route'	16% through CBC materials	25% through CBC materials	££	Medium	GSRWSG
10.1.9	Support P3 and Friends Groups to promote countryside access in their own areas (e.g. locally produced leaflets, interpretive panels etc)	No of groups producing their own materials	10	20	££	Medium	GST/BRCC/NT
Outcome 2 – There will be an increased level of awareness of facilities close to where people live							
10.2.1	Have a presence at selected events in Central Bedfordshire either directly or via our partnerships	No of events attended	4pa	6pa	£	short - long	GST/BRCC/NT
10.2.2	Encourage and support Friends and P3 groups to attend local and community events to promote countryside access	No of events attended by groups	0	5 pa	£	Short	GST/BRCC
10.2.3	Support skill development within communities and groups through the 'Step this way' training programme	No of training courses run	3 events / yr	10 py	£	Medium	GST/BRCC
10.2.4	Widen promotion of 'Open Access areas' throughout Central Bedfordshire ensuring that the value and sensitivities of these special sites is understood.	No of articles in media/ internet	0	5 pa	£	Short	GST/NT/NE/BRCC
10.2.5	Develop outreach programmes with communities that are local but underrepresented on the Councils sites, either directly or in conjunction with local partners.	No of hard to reach groups engaged	0	10	££	Medium	BRCC/GST/NT/ BRCC
Outcome 3 – People will have good access to technical information about rights of way issues and the management of their local sites							
10.3.1	Online problem reporting for Public Rights of Way created	No of online reports	60% resolved	90% resolved	££	Medium	CBC IT
10.3.2	Information about rights of way processes will be available on line (temporary closures / diversion orders / how to guides)	Pages and online forms available	Not available	Available	£	Medium	CBC IT
10.3.3	Provide information on permissive paths [ppas] and cycle tracks in addition to the definitive network to provide a full picture of countryside access	% cycletracks and ppa on online maps	0	100%	£	Short	
10.3.4	Develop a guide for Town & Parish Councils and Community leaders on the management and roles and responsibilities of Rights of Way and wider countryside access	No of Guides sent out	0	All Parish and Town Councils to have received a copy	££	Medium	Town and parish councils
Aim 11 – Support and Provide Environmental Education opportunities							
Outcome 1– Parents and schools will have informed access to the natural environment							
Ref ^o	Deliverable	Measure	Baseline	Target	Resources	Timescale	Partners
11.1.1	New parental support / e-learning web provision will be developed to promote informed family access in the natural environment.	No of website hits	0	1000 pm	£££	Short	As appropriate

11.1.2	Continue to support our partners in the delivery of educational events e.g. Bug Lab / Run Wild and Forest Schools	No of events	4 pa	8 pa	£	Short	BRCC/ Greensand Trust
11.1.3	Introduce schools to their local green spaces; either facilitate through partners or provide direct support	No of schools visiting sites	2 pa	5 pa	£	Short	CBC Schools service/BRCC/GST
11.1.4	Through our partners we will promote the use of countryside sites by schools for educational activity	No of visits made by schools	Unknown	10 pa	£	Short	National Trust/ Greensand Trust

Healthy Spaces... which encourage us to get active

Aim 12 – Countryside Spaces and Rights of Way will facilitate play, health, well being and physical activities							
Outcome 1 – Strategies and new delivery partners will recognise the positive and cost effective role that countryside access plays in the health and wellbeing of the population							
Ref N ^o	Deliverable	Measure	Baseline	Target	Resources	Timescale	Partners
12.1.2	Ensure the health benefits that countryside access offers are properly documented in all relevant strategies and policy statements	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable	£	Long	LNP
Outcome 2 – Countryside Access will be a place to play and enjoy, with children and young people rediscovering and appreciating the natural environment							
12.2.1	Continue to develop 'Run Wild' natural play events at countryside sites	No of events	1	Extend to 2 each year	££	Medium	BRCC
12.2.2	Develop and promote the use of formal (as appropriate) and natural play facilities on countryside sites	No of sites with play facilities	11 sites	30 sites	££	Medium	As appropriate
Outcome 3 – Activities and events that promote Health and Physical Activity on countryside sites will promote the use of the wider landscape							
12.3.1	Review pilot to install outdoor gym equipment on National Trust Partnership sites; look to extend the installation of fitness equipment and resources to other sites if positively evaluated	No of sites with fitness equipment	1 site	Dependent on results of pilot	££	Short	National Trust
12.3.2	Support the use of our sites for exercise programmes and events e.g. military fitness, BLACKS / North Face – Single track and assault trail run.	No of sites running exercise programmes	0 sites	5 sites	£	Short	As appropriate
12.3.3	Develop and promote orienteering events and permanent courses on suitable countryside sites	No. Sites mapped and routes established for permanent courses	Three maps produced but no courses/ 1 events organised	3 permanent courses	££	Short	As appropriate
12.3.4	Develop 1 mile exercise walks as part of 'walk 4 life' NHS programme. Ensure that every community has a route.	Number of routes	14 routes on website	All 14 routes waymarked	£	Medium	As appropriate
12.4.5	FLAGSHIP PROJECT - Develop a new initiative, in partnership with Leisure Strategy outputs to support and extend Central Bedfordshire Health Walks programme and seek wider opportunities to support health and wellbeing outputs through outdoor and countryside access activities.	No. of Heath Walk Groups	13 Health Walk Groups	20 Health Walk Groups	£££	Short	BRCC

Growing Spaces... productive spaces that nourish and sustain new communities

Aim 13 – The quantity and quality of rights of way and greenspaces meet the needs of current and future communities

Outcome 1 – The Council will understand the needs of users and non users and the role that the site and access routes play in the green infrastructure network.

This will steer future management and site development.

Ref N ^o	Deliverable	Measure	Baseline	Target	Resources	Timescale	Partners
13.1.1	Countryside Site surveys will be undertaken every 3 years on major sites and every 5 years on the lower profile sites, with an action plan developed and publicised locally	No of surveys completed	3 pa	Maintain 3 pa	£	Short	NT,GST,WT,HR TC,ST
13.1.2	Rights of way surveys will be undertaken every 3 years. These will be used to inform resource allocation and OAIP action plan reviews	No of surveys completed	2010 survey	2013 [spring] survey	£	Short	As appropriate
13.1.3	A detailed assessment of the needs of users and stakeholders of the rights of way network will be undertaken every 5-10 years	Assesment completed	Not applicable	Not applicable	££	Medium	As appropriate
13.1.4	Establish and operate User Forums on all major sites and projects	No of sites with user forums	2	7	£	Medium	NT,GST,PC/TC
13.1.5	A study will be undertaken with an academic partner into the development of a model that can project the expected use of countryside facilities from new development	Study undertaken	Not applicable	Not applicable	££	Medium	As appropriate
13.1.6	FLAGSHIP PROJECT - Greenspace masterplanning and accessible landscapes - develop a new approach to promoting access to selected areas of Central Bedfordshire, this master planning approach will look to both improve the quality of access and the visitor experience - initial work to focus in the Ivel and Ouzel Valleys and in the Chalk Arc around luton dunstable and Houghton Regis	No of masterplans completer per annum	0	3 pa	££	Short	3rd Sector Environmental Partners inc GST, BRCC
13.1.7	Sites will be categorised, and a clear vision developed, for the standards of management and future development of each site. This will be linked to supporting the implementation of the Leisure Strategy	% of sites meeting management standards	to be determined when standards are set	to be determined when standards are set	£	Short	NT,GST,WT
13.1.8	Standards and Specifications will be drawn up to support for the delivery of linear access routes in new developments to support and supplement the Design Guide.	Standards created	Not applicable	Not applicable	£	Short	Not applicable
Outcome 2 – New sites will be established to meet the demands of increased housing							
13.2.1	Monitor planning applications to ensure that the quality and quantity of green space and rights of way provision meets agreed standards	% of relevant planning applications meeting standards	Unknown	100%	£	Short	Not applicable
13.2.2	New countryside sites in areas identified in the Leisure Strategy and the Green Infrastructure Plan will be developed to meet deficits in location and types of sites available	% of countryside sites identified in leisure strategy developed	Dependent on leisure strategy	Dependent on leisure strategy	£££	Short	NT,GST,WT, BRCC

Managing Delivery

Resourcing, Monitoring and
Accessibility



9 Managing Delivery

Resourcing, Monitoring and Accessibility

9.1 Monitoring and Performance

9.1.1 Business Planning

An annual Business Planning process will be used to support and apply detail to the delivery of the 10 Year Action Plan. Each Business Plan will be used to ensure that individual activities are captioned in a timely and effective way, identifying clear timescales, targets and accountabilities. It is intended that this business plan will be a rolling plan, which will assist in the profiling of work.

9.1.2 Internal Monitoring

Progress against the Action Plan will be monitored quarterly by the Executive Member with responsibility for this area of work.

9.1.3 Community Accountability

The Central Bedfordshire and Luton Joint Local Access Forum is a partnership of private landowners who use the countryside for business and local people who use the countryside for recreational purposes. The Forum contributes in an advisory capacity to the development of Rights of Way Improvement Plan(s)⁷³ for Central Bedfordshire Council and Luton Borough Council. It is a key vehicle for local consultation and provides a mechanism for the community to hold the council accountable for delivery of the Action Plan. The Local Access Forum will be provided with regular updates on progress.

9.1.4 Reporting

The council will produce an annual statement to our local communities reporting on performance against our priorities.

⁷³ This Strategy incorporates the Rights of Way Improvement Plan for Central Bedfordshire Council for 2013-31

A formal review of performance against the 10 year Action Plan will be undertaken in 2018 to assess the impact of the Action Plan over the first 5 years of delivery. This report will be circulated within the council and to stakeholders. It will be also made available to the public via the Central Bedfordshire Council website.

The council recognises that good quality information about outdoor access and the use of the countryside is of interest to the community. The council will provide updates, when appropriate, about how its performance impacts positively on quality of life through press coverage and via the Central Bedfordshire Council Website.

9.1.5 Revised Action Plan 2018-2023

The 10 year Action Plan will be reviewed and refreshed in 2018. The revised Action Plan 2018-2023 will build on the deliverables from the first five years. This will be made available to the public via the Central Bedfordshire Council website.

9.2 Funding Statement

9.2.1 Funding the 10 Year Action Plan

Many of the deliverables within the action plan require additional resourcing, in terms of staff time or funding, beyond the resources allocated through the core revenue budgets. Additional resourcing will come from a range of sources:

- Other internal sources such as the Local Transport Plan and the Capital Programme.
- External funding sources
- By off setting costs through other means (e.g. the increased use of volunteers or the introduction of additional internal and external chargeable services).
- Planning gain

The resourcing aspiration for the 10 Year Action Plan is to, wherever possible:

- Achieve value for money by leveraging in external funding;
- Develop a portfolio of income sources to increase the level of financial self sustainability and decrease the reliance on local authority funding;
- Adopt a more commercial approach to delivering our responsibilities by identifying opportunities for cost recovery.

9.2.2 Resourcing Tools

Fundraising Strategy

Those familiar with fundraising will appreciate that it is an ever-changing environment. A flexible Fundraising Strategy will be created as part of the business planning process and will be subject to regular review and change to take advantage of new opportunities.

Cost Recovery Methodology

A robust cost recovery methodology is necessary to ensure that chargeable services and commercial activity are not subsidised by other services. This will avoid negative impact on the delivery of council objectives. This methodology and the associated fees and charges should be reviewed annually and applied efficiently to ensure appropriate cost recovery.

CAS 500

This project will assess ways of maximising commercial activity and evaluate the potential of setting up a trading and charitable arm to deliver additional income generation outcomes.

9.2.3 Forms of Income

Grants	Sponsorship
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Non-repayable funds disbursed by one party (grant makers); often a government department, quango, the EU, a corporation, foundation or trust.• Grants are made to fund specific and time-limited projects and require some level of compliance and reporting.• Countryside grants previously awarded have come from a variety of sources including Growth Area Funding (GAF), Natural England and Landfill Tax (e.g. Wren and Biffa).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A financial donation provided by an organisation, normally corporate, to align itself with a brand, initiative or activity.• Many companies include sponsorship as part of their marketing strategies.• In times of recession, sponsorship is often one of the first forms of expenditure to be cut.
Fees and Charges	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003 allows Local Authorities to recover the costs of providing discretionary services.• Income from charges should not exceed the cost of providing them (i.e. do not make a profit)• Fees and charges should fully recover the costs of delivering services.• Fees and charges allow the council to provide services that might otherwise not be available to the local community.• Work can be undertaken for internal departments and external organisations and a charge can be levied to cover costs.• Charging does not generate a 'profit' but enables the department to manage resources flexibly; generating unrestricted funds to support core costs.	

Developer Contributions	Trading & Charitable Support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Given expected development in the area developer contributions will be secured from developments across the whole area. • Developer contributions are likely to be a potential source of funding for the implementation of some actions within this plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Local Government Act 2003 allows Local Authorities to trade at a profit through a trading company. • The council is assessing the viability of a countryside trading arm to trade more effectively. • A trading arm could be combined with a Charitable Trust to maximise charitable income sources. • Different legal models need to be carefully assessed for viability.

9.2.4 Fundraising Plan

The Fundraising Plan will provide a detailed plan of activity to support the 10 Year Action Plan and rolling business plans. A high-level summary of proposed content is detailed here:

Connecting Spaces

Core Funding: Aims, outcomes and actions for Connecting Spaces largely relate to statutory, health and safety and maintenance issues. There are few direct opportunities to generate external income to support this type of work and these activities should be largely funded through core Local Authority Budgets.

Grants: The exception to this general rule is the Natural England Paths for Communities funding stream, which has been established to develop and enhance the network of Public Rights of Way (PROW) in England. However, the funding stream is in high demand and ceases in May 2014 so Central Bedfordshire can only hope to receive funding for a small number of schemes. Some additional grant funding may be available from other sources for work relating to dog control, seats and signage if it can be incorporated into a wider project.

Fees and Charges: There are a number of chargeable services within Connecting Spaces (e.g. Public Path Orders). Fees will be assessed annually to ensure they appropriately recover the costs of delivering the service. Adopting a more commercial approach to services and identifying additional chargeable services, could provide more financial flexibility, providing unrestricted income which could subsidise the costs of mainstream activities and enable the core budget to be used elsewhere.

Breathing Spaces

Core Funding: A large proportion of spend relating to Breathing Spaces is for maintenance and health and safety work. As with Connecting Spaces there are few opportunities to generate income for this sort of work directly.

Grants: Proactive development of visitor facilities and infrastructure, including visitor centres, interpretation and play equipment could be externally funded using internal match funding to lever in grant monies. The Heritage Lottery Fund, BIG Lottery and Sport England are all possible funding sources for this type of activity. EU funding could be used to support biodiversity and youth activity.

Fees and Charges: Countryside sites offer the potential to offer chargeable/commercial activities on a cost recovery basis; facilitating the generation of income to help sites become financially self-sustaining. The council will undertake site assessments to explore income generation options (to include advertising and franchise opportunities); ensuring options have minimal impact on site character and critical management objectives.

A number of council sites are managed on the basis of a 'hub model' whereby income from the hub site financially sustains a network of local sites without income generating potential.

Trading and Charitable Support: A trading or charitable arm could open up additional opportunities for income generation. Trading of services on countryside sites could legally generate a profit which could be reinvested in the service. There is also potential to develop a programme for charitable donations and a legacy and memorial scheme through the charitable arm. Any income would support the long-term sustainability of sites. These opportunities will be explored through the CAS 500 project.

Healthy Spaces

Grants: There will be opportunities to seek grant funding for the development of formal and natural play on countryside sites. Local Trusts and Foundations, Lottery Programmes and Landfill Tax Credit Schemes (e.g. Wren Buckinghamshire) all offer funding for projects of this nature. EU funding also be accessed to support health and sport initiatives.

Fees and Charges: The use of countryside sites to promote health is a key priority for the council. However, there is demand from private companies to use these sites for commercial gain and we feel it is vital that we seek fees from these organisations to help support the maintenance and management of the sites themselves.

Local Spaces

Core Funding: Work with volunteer groups and Town and Parish Council's needs to be managed largely through the core budget, however, there are opportunities to off-set management costs through the use of volunteers.

Grants: Local communities should be supported to identify and apply for small grants to produce local literature and interpretative materials. Many small grant schemes are not open to application from Local Authorities but can be accessed by small community groups, however, they may need guidance and support in business planning, grant management, budget setting and writing applications.

Larger projects (e.g. Parental Support and E-Learning Website and "Step This Way" Volunteer Training Project) will be subject to council applications to grant funding streams such as Big Lottery.

Sponsorship: There is potential to develop sponsorship and advertising opportunities on council leaflets and on countryside sites and Rights of Way. These will be explored although it is recognised that the economic climate may not be conducive to business engagement on this basis.

Growing Spaces

Developer Contributions: In the past external grants have been available to support the purchase of new land holdings such as Linslade Wood and Rushmere Park (GAF) but these grant schemes no longer exist. Whilst grant opportunities will continue to be monitored it is likely that land purchases will need to stem from developer contributions. There is potential for landholdings to be gifted to the council as part of the developer contribution; however the cost of infrastructure and a commuted sum for site management should be considered alongside the gift. No

new site should be acquired unless a long term business plan is in place which identifies the financial viability of the site.

There are also opportunities to secure funding for the long-term use and management of Mineral and Waste Sites to incorporate different form of public access, including nature trails, permissive paths and open space.

Grants: External grants can and should, be sought to support both infrastructure development and activity programmes using new sites. The use of a Trading and Charitable Arm could be used to attract a wider range of grants, many of which are not available to application by a Local Authority. In the absence of such a vehicle then charitable partners could be sought to support the project and act as lead applicant on grant applications.

Trading and Charitable Support: Any major new sites and facilities should be developed not only to meet green infrastructure requirements but also to generate profit to help financially sustain that site and a number of other local sites using the hub model or other appropriate management model. A trading/ charitable arm would allow for the generation of trading income through:

- Chargeable activities (e.g. boating, fishing, cycle hire)
- New infrastructure and facilities (e.g. car parking, cafes).

Each site should be subject to business planning and financial modelling to balance user needs with income requirements.

9.2.5 Funding Policies

The following policies will underpin the Funding Plan:

OAIP - Policy Statement 20 – Sustainability of New Sites

The council will ensure that any new strategic sites created by the Local Authority must be financially self-sustaining following initial investment and the creation of necessary infrastructure.

OAIP - Policy Statement 21 – Sustainability of Countryside Facilities Developed through Section 106 or CIL

The council will seek a commuted sum to financially sustain the management of any new countryside sites or facilities developed through Section 106 or CIL for a minimum of 20 years.

OAIP - Policy Statement 22 – External Funding Assessments

The council will assess all new projects and work streams for viability of funding through external sources before Local Authority budgets are committed.

OAIP - Policy Statement 23 – Positive Promoted Partnerships

The council will ensure that Connecting Spaces expenditure can be incorporated into wider projects or programmes of work.

The council will actively seek opportunities for cross departmental working to support funding activities, draw down external funding and achieve mutual benefits.

The council will continue to work with partners to secure funding for projects with mutual benefits.

OAIP - Policy Statement 24 – Chargeable Services

The council will base all fees and charges on a robust cost recovery methodology to ensure other services are not negatively affected by their delivery.

9.3 Accessibility Statement

9.3.1 Accessibility and the Law

Central Bedfordshire Council is a Service Provider as specified by the Equality Act 2010 and therefore has the responsibility to ensure that the facilities and services that it provides are accessible to those with disabilities. The Equality Act itself is non-prescriptive and does not specify solutions to access problems and relies upon documents such as the Building Regulations Part M and BS 8300 Design of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people – Code of Practice; these generally apply to the built environment. There are no definitive standards for accessibility in the countryside environment but there are a number of standards published by various organisations and these can be considered “Best Practice”. It is for the Service Provider to take reasonable steps to deliver the service or make the venue accessible by any or alternative means to fulfil his responsibilities under the Equality Act.

The key words are “alternative means” and “reasonableness”. Solutions maybe delivered by an alternative means as in the case of heron nests for example. Binoculars may be provided to allow people to view the herons but for those with visual and or comprehension impairments these may not be practical. Installing a camera local to the Heron nests and displaying this on a television screen in the Visitors Centre demonstrates delivery of the service by “alternative means” and meeting the needs of those with disabilities.

For the purposes of this project we have used the following publications to provide guidance:-

- Fieldfare Trust - “A Good Practice Guide to Disabled Peoples Access to the Countryside
- Tourism for All - Providing Accessible Visitor Attractions.
- The Countryside Agency - Landscape Access Recreation – On the Right Track.
- The Countryside Agency - Landscape Access Recreation – By all reasonable means.
- British Standard 8300:2009 - Design of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people – Code of Practice

9.3.2 Accessibility within the OAIP

The OAIP has been designed to ensure that the council:

- Meets relevant legal duties; e.g. the Equality Act, Countryside and Rights of Way Act, Race Relations Act
- Appropriately maintains the physical environment in accordance with the Least Restrictive Access Policy; which includes sites, structures, furniture, rights of way and provision of facilities for disabled people
- Appropriately maintains the intellectual environment; which includes language, labelling, interpretation, accessibility statements, mapping and signage
- Recognises and addresses other potential barriers to users; to be mitigated through staff training, representation of diverse communities, reasonable pricing and better web accessibility through 'Disabled Go'⁷⁴
- Provides resources to promote and support access for all; including core or prioritised funding and appropriate staffing
- Maintains a good understanding of our users and potential users; through research and evidence-gathering, outreach, community profiling, surveys and awareness of the priorities of key local partners
- Provides ways to engage all its users and potential users, promoting a sense of identity and affording opportunities to celebrate diversity. The plan supports community participation in outdoor access and activities plus events which appeal to a wide range of people
- Encourages any people and communities who have not taken advantage of the benefits of the countryside before to get involved – to 'get out' and enjoy its benefits

⁷⁴ 'Disabled Go' is a website www.disabledgo.com detailing access information for a wide array of public sites and facilities including parks and gardens.

10 Glossary

ANGSt	Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard – methodology for determining appropriate levels of greenspace
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – The Chilterns AONB extends into Central Bedfordshire
BRCC	Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity
CIL	Community Infrastructure Levy
CROW	Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000
CWS	County Wildlife Site
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DfT	Department for Transport
FOMV	Forest of Marston Vale – national community forest partially within Central Bedfordshire
GI	Green Infrastructure
GST	The Greensand Trust
HRTC	Houghton Regis Town Council – partner on Houghton Hall HLF Bid
LAF	Local Access Forum – a partnership with land users who act as a consultative body representing local communities
LATP	Local Area Transport Plan – plan providing detailed activity for priority areas within the LTP
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership – ‘Central Bedfordshire Together’ is the name of Central Bedfordshire’s LSP
LTP	Local Transport Plan – framework for investment in transport across Central Bedfordshire
HRTC	Houghton Regis Town Council – partner on Houghton Hall HLF Bid
MENE	Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE)- the national survey on people and the natural environment

NCN	National Cycle Network
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework – planning guidance
NT	National Trust
OAIP	Outdoor Access Improvement Plan
P3	People, Projects, Partnerships – a scheme which involved from the national Parish Paths Partnership established in 1993 which aimed to empower local groups to manage their local Rights of Way Network
PROW	Public Rights of Way – the network of paths, bridleways and
ROW	Rights of Way
S106	Section 106 planning agreements
SPD	Supplementary Planning Documents
SSSI	Sites of Special Scientific Interest
ST	The Shuttleworth Trust
STC	Sandy Town Council – ‘Partner in Walkers are Welcome’
TCV	The Conservation Volunteers

Conversion Tables

1 Kilometre =	1 Mile =
0.621 Miles	1.609 Kilometres
1 Hectare =	1 Acre =
2.471 Acres	0.405 Hectare

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