

Green Corridors

Definition

- 13.1 This open space type includes towpaths along canals and riverbanks, cycleways, rights of way and disused railway lines. Green corridors are linear routes with a primary purpose of providing opportunities for walking, cycling and horse riding, whether for leisure purposes or travel. Green corridors also facilitate wildlife migration.
- 13.2 Green corridors can be particularly valuable in towns, facilitating links between open spaces and local residents. Green corridors also provide valuable linkages between the towns and outlying rural settlements. As highlighted throughout this report, in many instances enhancing links between open spaces will be as important as the development of new sites.

Worcester and Birmingham Canal



Strategic context and consultation

- 13.3 In addition to improving sustainability and linking urban areas with nearby rural countryside, green corridors represent an important chance to promote sustainable transport by cycle and on foot. Provision and use of green corridors will be a key determinant in the achievement of targets for participation in sport and active recreation.
- 13.4 The latest government plan published by the Department for Transport and entitled “Walking and Cycling: an action plan” states:
- “Walking and cycling are good for our health, good for getting us around, good for our public spaces and good for our society, for all these reasons we need to persuade more people to choose to walk and cycle more often”
- 13.5 Providing a high quality infrastructure will not only increase use of green corridors, but linkages between sites will increase usage of individual open space sites and reduce barriers to access.
- 13.6 The rural nature of Bromsgrove lends itself to the provision of linear corridors which link open spaces (and settlements) together. The district contains a wide variety of canals and towpaths that form the basis of the green infrastructure.

SECTION 13 – GREEN CORRIDORS

- 13.7 In the main, the County Council (Worcestershire County Council) are responsible for the public rights of way (PROW) in the District. Worcestershire has a network of 3,000 miles of public rights of way and the Worcestershire Countryside Service has a statutory responsibility for these Public Rights of Way.
- 13.8 As a Highway Authority, Worcestershire County Council has a duty to assert and protect the rights of way network. However the responsibility for ensuring that paths are safe and convenient for the public to use is shared between a number of others including the District councils, landowners and users.
- 13.9 Worcestershire County Council's responsibilities include:
- signposting paths where they leave a metalled road
 - waymarking paths along the route of the path
 - clearance of undergrowth
 - ensuring landowners comply with their responsibilities.
- 13.10 Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, Worcestershire County Council produced a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) in 2007. The plan outlines and prioritises countryside access improvements over the next five years.
- 13.11 The Worcestershire County Council Rights Of Way Improvement Plan outlines a number of strategic aims for the County, including:
- to provide a rights of way network that meets the needs of the public
 - to ensure the rights of way network is easy to use
 - to balance the different needs of users and others with an interest in the rights of way network
 - to raise awareness of, promote and build confidence in the rights of way network
 - to manage resources and the rights of way network in an efficient and targeted manner.
- 13.12 The Worcestershire Countryside Access and Recreation Strategy aims to provide access to high quality countryside recreation opportunities.
- 13.13 The objectives of the strategy are:
- ensuring opportunity is available for all sections of the community to enjoy the countryside
 - securing and promoting opportunities for countryside access
 - encouraging and enabling local communities to become involved in and take action to share and increase the benefits of countryside recreation opportunities
 - to manage and promote responsible land uses

- making use of recreational opportunities whilst protecting and enhancing the environmental qualities of the countryside
- to provide a wide range of high quality facilities to ensure the demands of users are catered for to help them enjoy recreational opportunities
- continuing to promote the health and well being qualities associated with countryside recreation
- promoting alternative forms of transport to access the countryside.

13.14 As well as being a key partner in the delivery of the ROWIP, Bromsgrove District Council’s commitment to the provision of green corridors is emphasised in the Local Plan where it commits to enhancing and maintaining all public and privately owned space of recreational and amenity value.

Consultation

13.15 Consultation on the provision of green corridors in Bromsgrove was undertaken through a variety of methods. The findings showed that:

- 5% of respondents to the household survey use green corridors more frequently than any other open space. However, 46% of residents use green corridors either daily or weekly – this represents a significant amount of usage
- 41% of respondents to the household survey felt the quality of green corridors was average. 31% of residents perceived the quality of this type of open space to be good, suggesting that overall green corridors are perceived to be of higher quality than some other types of open space
- findings within the individual analysis areas provide differing results, with the majority of residents in three of the five analysis areas stating the quality of green corridors is good. However, residents in Bromsgrove North East felt the quality of green corridors was average
- dog fouling was considered to be the main problem experienced by users of green corridors
- green corridors were popular with walkers in the district, with many residents highlighting the recreational opportunities this type of open space provides.

13.16 The Longridge Area Action Plan currently considers opening up the river corridor to provide a central feature through the open space.

GC1	Building on the popularity of green corridors, the council should look to enhance and develop pathways along the rivers and canals and promote these natural resources as recreational opportunities.
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Setting Local Standards

Quantity standard

13.17 The Annex A of PPG17 – Open Space Typology states:

“the need for Green Corridors arises from the need to promote environmentally sustainable forms of transport such as walking and cycling within urban areas. This means that **there is no sensible way of stating a provision standard**, just as there is no way of having a standard for the proportion of land in an area which it will be desirable to allocate for roads”.

13.18 It is therefore recommended that no provision standard should be set. PPG17 goes onto to state that:

“Instead planning policies should promote the use of green corridors to link housing areas to the Sustrans national cycle network, town and city centres, places of employment and community facilities such as schools, shops, community centres and sports facilities. In this sense green corridors are demand-led. However, planning authorities should also take opportunities to use established linear routes, such as disused railway lines, roads or canal and river banks, as green corridors, and supplement them by proposals to ‘plug in’ access to them from as wide an area as possible”.

13.19 The linear nature of green corridors means it is inappropriate to measure the area and assess these spaces. Nevertheless their importance within the district should not be undermined as they provide an essential linkage between open spaces and increase the accessibility of other sites.

Quality

- 13.20 While it is inappropriate to measure the area of green corridors, quality is central to their use and value both as a recreational resource and also as a means of enhancing wildlife.
- 13.21 A quality vision, based on the aspirations of the local community of Bromsgrove has therefore been set below. Full justifications for the recommended local standards are provided within Appendix G.

Quality Standard (see Appendix G)

Recommended standard – Green corridors		
Local consultation, national guidance and best practice suggest that the following features are essential and desirable to local residents:		
Essential	Desirable	
Footpaths	Flowers and trees	
Clean and litter free	Level surface	
Nature features	Dog bins	
Detailed analysis of the local consultation suggests that with regards to green corridors, the relative importance of the key components is as follows:		
Component of quality	Proportion of possible total responses received	Weighting
Security and Safety	7%	1
Cleanliness and maintenance	21%	2
Vegetation	52%	4
Ancillary accommodation	23%	3
GC2	Providers of green corridors in Bromsgrove should aspire to the essential and desirable quality features.	

Accessibility standard

13.22 There is no requirement to set catchments for green corridors as they cannot be easily influenced through planning policy and implementation.

Applying provision standards

13.23 Given that it is not appropriate to set any local quantity or accessibility standards, it is also not appropriate to state areas of deficiency or need based on standards.

13.24 Instead, the aim should be to provide an integrated network of high quality green corridors linking open spaces together and with residential areas and providing opportunities for informal recreation and alternative means of transport. As highlighted in many of the previous sections, enhancing the existing green space network through the creation of additional linkages will be as important as creating new open spaces.

13.25 In light of the high value placed on green corridors by local residents, the Local Development Framework (LDF) should protect existing corridors and support enhancements to the overall network. In particular, consideration should be given to linking open spaces together, as well as linking settlements to the open spaces. Links between local settlements and the two country parks should be treated as a particular priority.

GC3	Linking existing green corridors with open spaces in the district should be a key priority. This will provide opportunities for informal recreation and alternative means of transport. The LDF should facilitate the protection of existing corridors as well as the development of the network. Existing natural resources (such as the River Corridors) provide significant opportunities to enhance the overall network.
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13.26 The Public Rights of Way network will be instrumental in the delivery of an enhanced network of linear routes to increase connectivity in the district. The Improvement plan identifies several priorities. Current links to the countryside are perceived to be poor.

GC4	The Council should work in tandem with Worcestershire County Council, the Primary Care Trust and other key partners to help maximise the use of green corridors and Public Rights of Way in the district and to deliver the PROW improvement plan.
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13.27 In addition to delivering an overall joined up network, improvements to the quality of existing corridors will be essential if current usage is to be maintained and increased. This may include improved signage, improved safety and enhanced maintenance of paths. All of these were identified as key issues during consultation. Sustrans National Cycle Route 5 routes directly through Bromsgrove Town although much of this route has been highlighted as being not directly suitable for cyclists.

GC5	Drive a programme of qualitative improvements across the district including enhanced maintenance of footpaths and increased signage.
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13.28 As highlighted in previous sections, improving health and physical activity is a key priority for the Council. Appropriate provision of green corridors and promotion of the opportunities available will have a positive influence on the drive to reduce health inequalities. Enhancing access to green corridors will therefore emphasise the role that outdoor recreation can play in delivering a number of health, economic and sustainable health objectives.

13.29 The Bromsgrove Walking and Cycling Initiative aims to promote the use of corridors, walkways and cycleways as an alternative to car. A map has been produced outlining all opportunities within the Bromsgrove area. This should be promoted and updated as the network improves. Sustrans National Cycle Route 5 bisects Bromsgrove Town. The recent Active People Survey (Sport England 2007) indicates that marginally more people in Bromsgrove participate in cycling than the Worcestershire and Herefordshire County Sports Partnership average.

GC6	Promote the opportunities available to increase usage of green corridors. As well as increasing awareness, partnership working with the PCT and other key organisations to deliver opportunities should be considered.
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13.30 The role of green corridors should not be considered to be purely recreational. Consideration should also be given to the provision of effective wildlife corridors, enabling the migration of species across the district.

GC7	Promote the development of green corridors for wildlife as well as for recreational uses. Ensure that any maintenance regime is sympathetic to both roles.
GC8	Investigate the feasibility of a green infrastructure study to help maximise the linkages of open spaces with green corridors and help create a network of multi-functional greenspace in Bromsgrove. This should serve as an extension to this PPG17 Study and should link with adjoining authorities.

Summary

13.31 Green corridors provide opportunities close to peoples' homes for informal recreation, particularly walking and cycling, as part of every day activities, for example, travel to work or shops. Therefore the development of a linked green corridor network will help to improve the health and well being of the local community. In this way, green corridors can be integral to the achievement of targets for increased active recreation.

13.32 There are already a large number of footpaths and green corridor networks within the study area and consultation indicates that they are well-used. Future opportunities and developments should seek to enhance the pathways along rivers and canals.

13.33 Future development needs to encompass linkages between large areas of open space, create opportunities to develop the green corridor network and utilise potential development sites. Development should consider both the needs of wildlife and humans.

13.34 A network of multi-functional greenspace will contribute to the high quality natural and built environment required for existing and new sustainable communities in the future. An integrated network of high quality green corridors will link open spaces, helping to alleviate other open space deficiencies and provide opportunities for alternative means of transport. Sustrans National Cycle Route 5 routes directly through Bromsgrove Town although much of this route has been highlighted as being not directly suitable for cyclists.

13.35 The key priorities for the future delivery of green corridors should therefore include:

- working in tandem with Worcestershire County Council, the PCT and other key partners to help maximise the use of green corridors and Public Rights of Way in the District and to deliver the PROW improvement plan
- facilitating the protection and development of the network through the inclusion of appropriate policies in the LDF
- driving a programme of qualitative improvements across the district including enhanced maintenance of footpaths and increased signage
- promoting the opportunities available to increase usage of green corridors
- maximising the use of natural resources such as river corridors for walking, cycling and wildlife
- undertaking a green infrastructure assessment in conjunction with adjoining local authorities.