

Connecting Spaces: Rights of Way

...taking you through the landscape



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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.

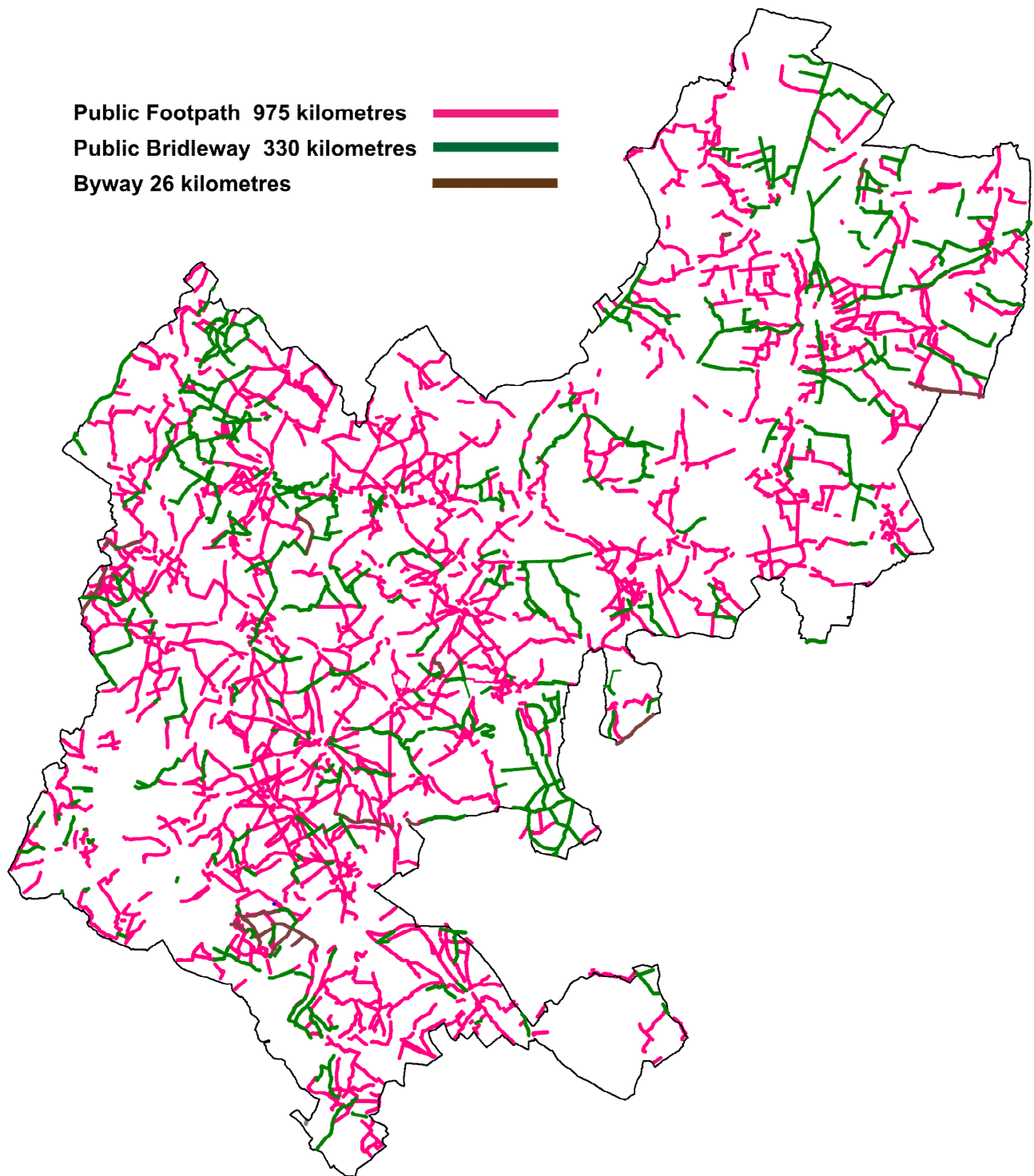
The principle of least restrictive access is that the improvements will benefit all users not only those with restricted mobility.

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.

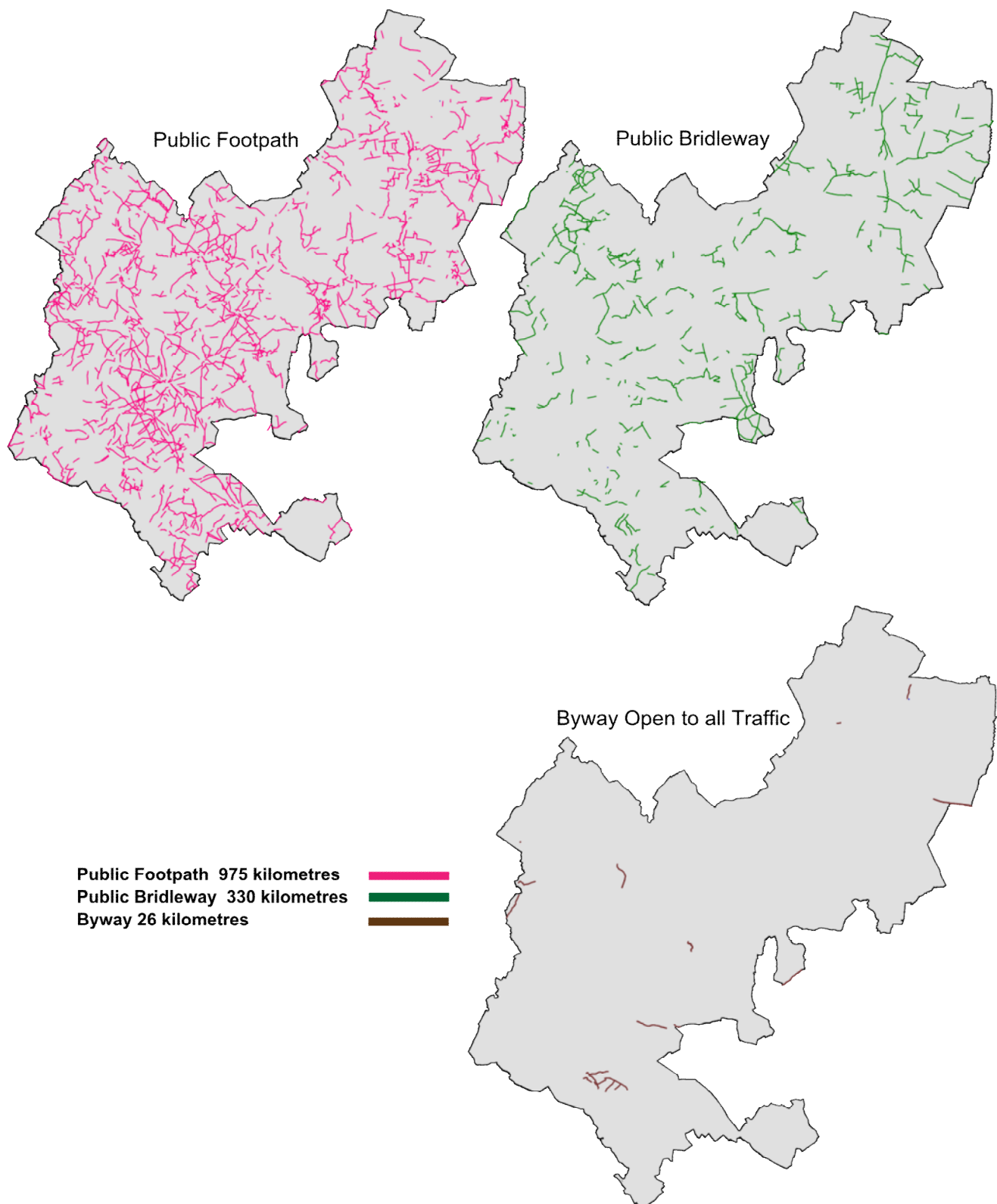
The policy covers all structures placed across public rights of way including those structures erected for livestock purposes, structures erected for safety reasons and all other structures that are a permanent or temporary barrier to full access along the right of way. This policy does not include bridges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

PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY NETWORK



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PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY



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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

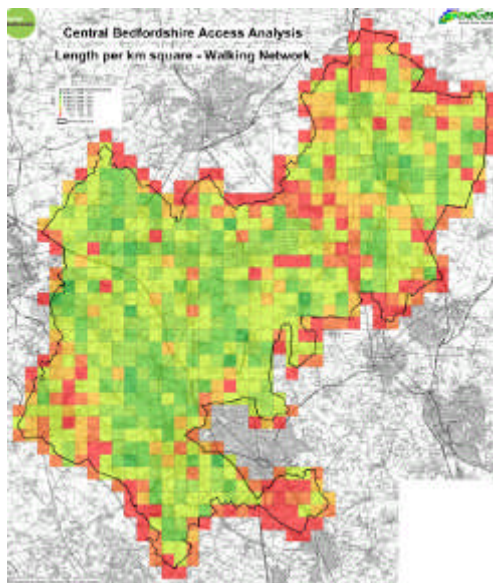
Statutory and Legal Responsibilities

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

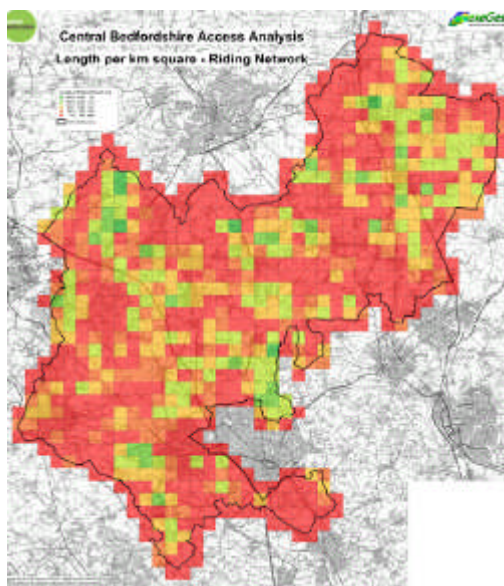
During 2009, exeGesIS SDM Ltd were commissioned to assess the density, connectivity and distribution of public path provision across Central Bedfordshire and to determine the accessibility of the network from each settlement for all legal users of the network. The maps below show the some of the results 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.

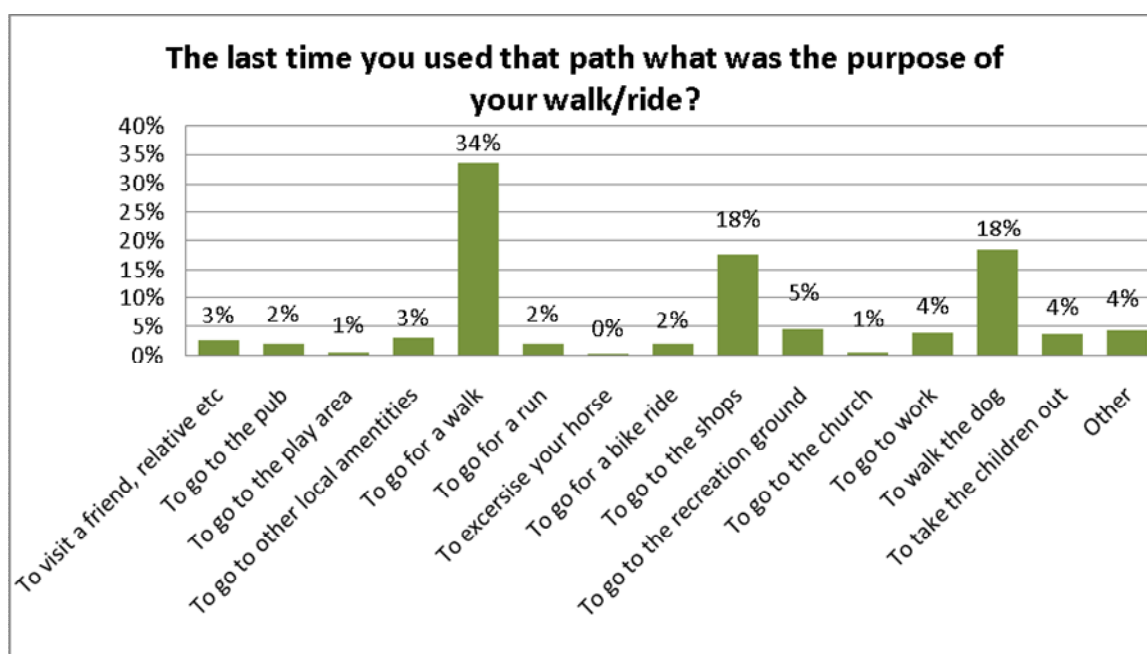
Users may not always differentiate between public rights of way and other means of access. The council will, therefore, continue to explore the full range of access creation tools available and work with other bodies to facilitate access by means of creating public rights of way, cycle routes, permissive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

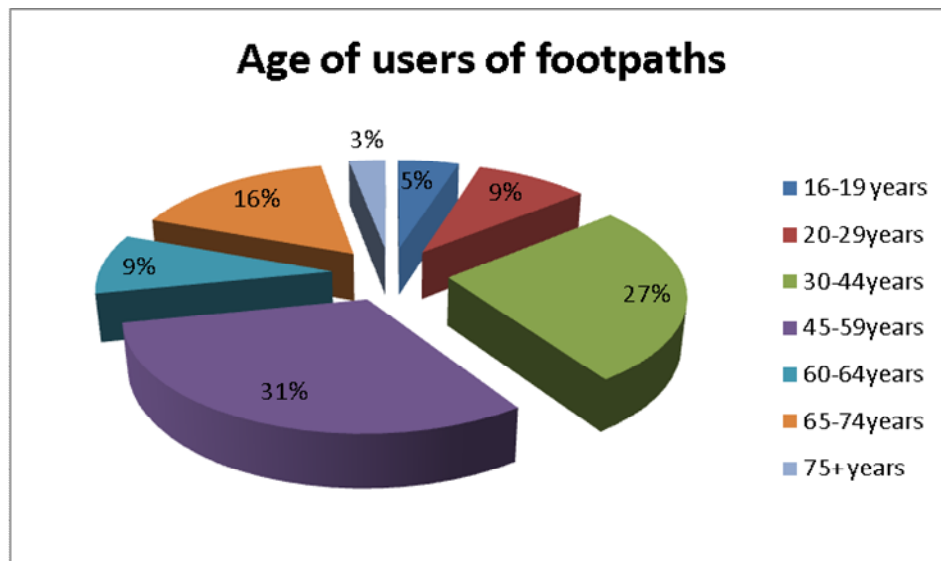
Walking the dog or going for a walk were the most commonly mentioned activities along the rights of way, however going to the shops was popular too, by respondents to the telephone survey.



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

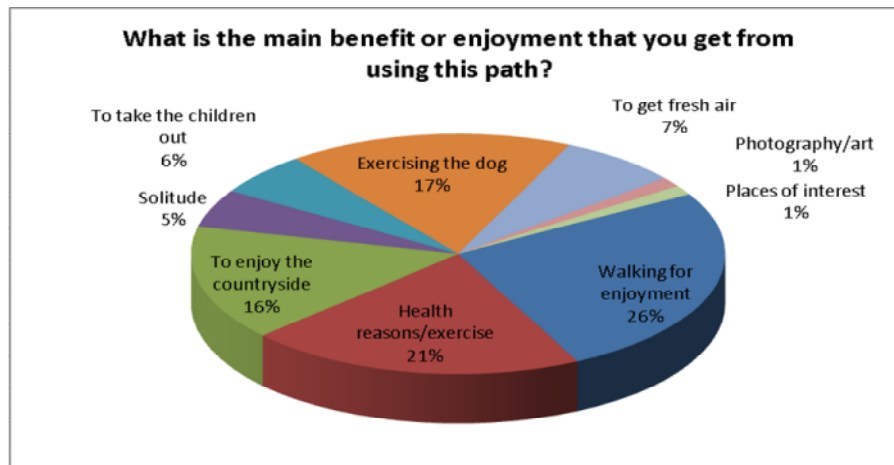
ROW User Survey data shows that Public Rights of Way are an important part of local life; facilitating access to local amenities, playgrounds, shops, work and the pub. The council recognises the value that local people put on their local routes and works hard to ensure they are local spaces, with tangible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