



4.1. Introduction

Why are rights of way important to city dwellers and is this plan relevant to our needs? People who think public rights of way only exist in the countryside may well ask this question and so believe they are not important in meeting the needs of a city community. In fact, in Birmingham there are at least 2,500 known public rights of way which, when combined with public parks, open space, canals and other accessible areas, make up a huge local resource, providing opportunities for walking, cycling and enjoyment of the outdoors.

In preparing this plan the Council has identified the needs and circumstances of Birmingham residents and visitors who have a wide range of expectations, interests and levels of ability.

To do this, it has been necessary to look at access and identify areas and opportunities where improvements can be made. Examples of the areas considered include the Ley Hill Estate in Bartley Green, Hawkesley in Kings Norton as well as access to areas in neighbouring authorities i.e. Sandwell, Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Dudley, Staffordshire, Walsall and Solihull. Some aspects considered were:

- Improvements that can be made to encourage walking and cycling for local journeys to schools, shops, public transport and leisure facilities.
- Restrictions of access to routes caused by railways, motorways and other main roads in order to identify where improvements can be made between communities and facilities either side of these routes, as well as improving safety at these places.
- Identifying areas were paths could be consolidated to provide better-quality routes offering more opportunities for access, yet preserving the tranquillity and improved enjoyment of residential areas. Also identifying a number of areas where new routes are needed to create improved links to local facilities, or longer walks to increase opportunities for recreation and exercise.
- To ensure that there is a continuity of links in the network, and that opportunities for developing new, high-quality routes are included in new developments where possible.

Just as there are various types of rights of way in the city, there is also great variety in the abilities of people using them, their complex needs and their reasons for use. There is no one solution to improving the rights of way network in Birmingham. However, the solutions that we intend to implement as part of this plan aim to improve access for

everyone, regardless of their level of mobility.

The following section will discuss the characteristics and needs of the user groups of the public rights of way network, listed in the order presented in the DEFRA guidance.

4.2. Walkers

Walking is one of the most popular leisure activities in Great Britain. The Great Britain Day Visits Survey, a survey about visiting places in the UK for leisure, reported that in 2002/03 4.5 billion leisure day visits to places of interest in the UK were made, with 16% of these visits specifically dedicated to walking, hill walking and rambling.

Walkers generally fall into two categories: those who walk for practical reasons such as to work or to the shops; and those who walk for pleasure, recreation or health. People who walk for recreation can be sub-grouped as dog walkers, casual walkers and ramblers.

The Day Visits Survey groups the types of walking activities as:

 short walks and strolls (including dog walking) of less than two miles;

- long walks, hikes, or rambles of over two miles; and
- hill walks (excluding mountaineering and climbing).

There are many reasons why walking is such a popular recreation:

- It does not require expensive or specialist equipment.
- Routes are widely available.
- Walking is an excellent form of exercise, which people of all levels of fitness and ability can do, with many health benefits.
- Walking does not discriminate in terms of income, race, class or education. However, research does show (Kay 2002, cited on the Ramblers' Association website) that recreational walking is still largely a pastime of the more wealthy white, middle and upper classes and that only a relatively small proportion of the lower classes and ethnic minorities walk for pleasure.

In a large urban environment like Birmingham, there are many opportunities for practical and recreational walking trips, for example walking to:

- work
- exercise the dog
- local amenities like shops and doctors' surgeries
- school, college, university
- public transport stops or stations
- recreational facilities.

Of all the journeys made in Birmingham, 17% are less than 2km, which is easily walkable for most people (2001 Census, Distance Travelled to Work: Table UV35). However, a third of these journeys are currently made by car, so there is potential to reduce the number of short car trips by encouraging people to walk.

The following is a list of current or recent Council initiatives to improve walking conditions in the city. These are in addition to the work that will be done as part of the RoWIP.

- Pedestrianising parts of the city centre.
- Closing the subways to reduce antisocial behaviour.
- Installing CCTV cameras.
- Improving the maintenance of street lighting.
- Inner-city road safety programme.
- Pedestrian crossings.
- Walking and cycling map.
- Walk 2000 route in every constituency.
- Safer routes to school and school travel plans.

4.3. Cyclists

When preparing our RoWIP, the needs of cyclists were considered especially because of their vulnerability where they come into contact with traffic. Although on-road cycle routes and crossings are not part of the public rights of

way network, they can often help connect areas of park land and off-road cycle routes (for example the Rea Valley route).

The 2006 West Midlands Local Transport Plan states that cycling in the region is a 'thinly spread activity' which is becoming less popular. It is difficult to accurately measure the amount of cycling that takes place daily, but the 2001 census found that only 0.75% of journeys to work in Birmingham were made by bicycle.

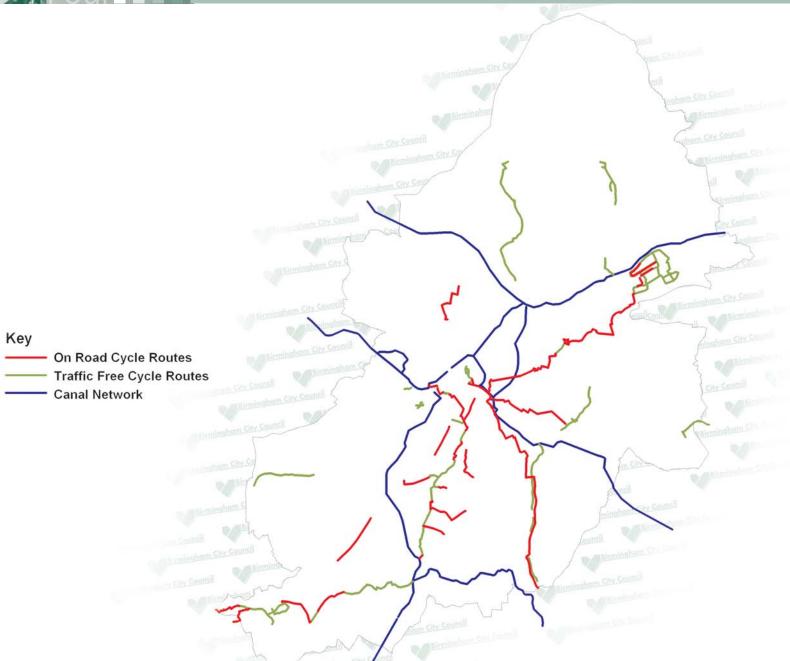
Birmingham City Council's cycling policy is to:

- develop a city-wide cycle route network
- identify and tackle dangerous locations for cyclists
- take cyclists' needs into account in all road maintenance and construction
- encourage cycling for all journeys, but especially under five miles
- provide more cycle parking facilities.

In Birmingham there are about 46km of off-road cycle routes (Table 6, p29). These routes enable cyclists to ride in a safe environment, away from road traffic and pollution, and where possible experience an attractive natural environment (See Figure 2, p22).



Figure 2: Map of cycle routes across Birmingham



Identifying areas of the city

A clear acetate overlay showing the constituencies is at the back of this document

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The requirements of cyclists differ greatly and depend on why they cycle and what they want to achieve from the activity. The types of cyclist can be divided into the following categories, as reported by York City Council's RoWIP (Palmer 2003):

- Family groups: require security, for example that they are not going to get lost or encounter difficulties with the landscape.
- Casual or occasional cyclists: similar needs to family groups.
- Ramblers on two wheels: more map-aware, more likely to venture onto the local rights of way network and better able to cope with varied terrain.
- · Active lifestyle cyclists.
- Serious enthusiasts: require longer routes over terrain suited to their interest.

In Birmingham there are many routes that are geared to the needs of the family and casual cyclists, such as the routes around the larger country parks. Routes such as the Cole Valley and the Rea Valley, which follow the courses of the two rivers, provide longer-distance challenges over more varied terrain and are more suited to the casual and rambling riders. National cycle network route 5 and regional cycle route 55 cross the city, linking into the national and regional cycling networks and so provide longer-distance challenges for the more experienced rider.

An 'Active Travel Group Partnership' (BCC, the four Primary Care Trusts in the city, the British Heart Foundation, Walk the Way to Health, Walk 2000 and Centro) aims to promote cycling and other forms of active travel as part of people's daily routine. The free walking and cycling map that BCC has produced with the National Health Service (NHS) illustrates some of the main cycle routes across the city.



Improving cycling conditions on the rights-of-way network will help to achieve the targets set in the Local Transport Plan under the headings of the four shared priorities: reducing congestion, improving road safety, increasing accessibility and improving air quality as well as quality of life.

4.4. Horse riders

Horse riders are a small percentage of the total users of the rights of way network in Birmingham. In Birmingham there are only 2.6km of bridleways that horse riders can ride on safely without conflict with vehicles (see Figure 1). Most of the bridleways (94%) are in Sutton Coldfield.

The other sections of bridleway are in Woodgate Valley Country Park in the South West of Birmingham. This includes permissive routes which horse riders are allowed to use.

Research that Sheffield Hallam University (2004) carried out for Hampshire County Council's RoWIP found that horse riders prefer to use safe off-road routes. These findings suggest that there is a significant level of suppressed demand for the activity. Furthermore, their research concluded that many people who do not own a horse nevertheless ride. These findings also are supported by statistics from the British Horse Society, which state that around 2.4 million people ride 1 million horses each year.



Horse riders are a vulnerable user group, not only because they often have to share road space with traffic, but also because of the nature of the activity. Research compiled by York City Council for their Bridleways Survey found that over half of the respondents who were horse riders said they had been involved in an accident with a vehicle, or experienced a near miss, with 82% stating that they had to ride along or across busy roads during their ride.

There are no policies in the West Midlands Local Transport Plan dealing specifically with horse riders.

4.5. Carriage drivers

Nationally, carriage drivers are a very small group of road users. Research by the Countryside Agency in their 2000 condition survey discovered that carriage drivers have similar needs to those of other vulnerable road users – they need routes that are not obstructed by surface vegetation or low-growing trees and branches, are well drained and not rutted, flooded or boggy, and not so narrow as to be impossible to pass along.

Carriage drivers are permitted to use roads used as public paths, byways open to all traffic, and, in some special cases, bridleways. In Birmingham there are no resticted byways or byways open to all traffic and very few bridleways, so opportunities to drive a carriage are very limited.

4.6. Mechanically propelled vehicles and motor vehicles

The mechanically-propelled vehicle is a broader concept than motor vehicle – all motor vehicles are mechanically propelled vehicles, but some mechanically propelled vehicles are not 'intended or adapted for use on the roads'. Mechanically propelled vehicles can include child-sized motorcycles, quads and all motorised vehicles as defined in the Road Traffic Act 1988 (DEFRA 'Regulating the use of motorised vehicles on public rights of way and off road', 2005).

These vehicles are only allowed to use 'byways open to all traffic', and, in some special cases, roads used as public paths. There are however no byways open to all traffic in Birmingham, which restricts users of motorised vehicles for off-road activities to privately owned land. The amount of public land available to dedicate to off-road vehicles is limited in Birmingham as land for development and land for recreation is at a premium.

Even though there are no byways open to all traffic in Birmingham that motorised vehicles are permitted to use, riding on rights of way illegally does happen, mainly by motorcycles, although how much this happens has not yet been analysed.



4.7. Mobility impaired and visually impaired One of the main aims of the RoWIP for Birmingham is to ensure that the network of routes is accessible and available for all to enjoy, regardless of ability. To do this, we need to consider carefully a wide range of users' needs.



In Great Britain there are about 10 million people who are covered by the legislation in the 2005 Disability Discrimination Act. The term 'disability' does not just refer to people who are 'disabled'. It also refers to people who may have reduced mobility for a short period of time, for example people with young children, people carrying heavy shopping or luggage, people who are temporarily injured, and the elderly. Similarly, the term 'disabled' also refers to people who have a physical or mental disability. It is estimated that 12 to 13 percent of the population have some degree of disability (Department for Transport, Inclusive Mobility).

The main aim of the RoWIP is to help reduce the number of barriers to people using the rights of way network by bringing it up to an acceptable level for the mobility and visually impaired. Initiatives to achieve this will include replacing stiles with accessible gates (where possible), improving the maintenance of path surfaces, and providing adequate lighting and information. These initiatives will benefit all network users: widening paths for wheelchair users will also benefit walkers and cyclists by allowing more room to pass and reducing conflict; ensuring signs are clear and easy to understand for people with visual impairments will also benefit children and people with learning difficulties. Sometimes paths will not be suitable for those with mobility or visually impairment, even after schemes to improve access, for example the landscape may



prevent us making the necessary changes without major alterations to the environment.

Table 7 (p26) shows the needs of mobility-impaired users and lists some of the BCC initiatives to improve accessibility.

The Draft Rowip has been presented to the Access

Committee for Birmingham and the comments and suggestions sought. These can be found in Appendix D. Their main concern was to ensure that the Clty Council ensured that new developments were designed to enable people with disabilities ease of movement.



Table 7: Needs of the mobility and visually impaired and Council measures to improve access

Needs of wheelchair users	Needs of people with walking difficulties	Initiatives to improve the environment for the mobility impaired	Needs of the visually impaired	Initiatives to improve the environment for the visually impaired
Signs at eye level	Level, even surface on paths	Blue Badge parking	Space to pass other path users	Wayfinder talking signs system – 60 units across the city centre
Gates that are easy to open and close and catches that are easy to operate	Steps with handrails and even treads and risers	Highways services for disabled people	Clear edges to paths	
Adequate space in car parks to transfer from car to chair	Seats that are easy to rise from	50% discount on dropped kerbs	Even and clearly marked steps	
Accessible toilet facilities	Minimum gaps in the path surface	Ring-and-ride services	Warning of hazards at head height	
Handrails at appropriate heights	Minimum gradients on paths	Shop-mobility services	Even path surfaces	
Firm, level and non-slip surfaces	Stiles that are easy to pass through and gates that are easy to operate and are not heavy	Centro disability services	User-friendly catches on gates	
Space to pass other users and turn around	Resting places at regular intervals	Disabled persons railcard		
Minimum gradients with a level space next to ramps or gates		More accessible public transport		



4.8. Black and minority ethnic groups

The research consultancy Ethnos, recently examined the reasons why black and minority ethnic (BME) as well as other groups, were under-represented in the walking-forrecreation statistics. BME groups make up 10% of the population in the UK, but only 2% of BME groups use the countryside for recreation. In light of these findings, the Government set targets to try to raise the figure from 2% to 10%. Increasing the number of BME groups using outdoor recreation is particularly important in view of the fact that statistics show that people of South Asian origin living in Great Britain have a 50% higher chance of dying prematurely from coronary heart disease (British Heart Foundation, 2003)

There are several reasons why fewer people from BME groups walk for recreation. In many BME groups it is simply not a cultural thing to walk for pleasure or recreation. It was found that people from BME communities did not see the pleasure in walking and saw walking quite simply as a less efficient mode of transport than the car. For some BME communities, walking in country parks and the countryside was seen as a step backwards, because in their native countries they had walked in the rural areas where they had lived out of necessity, and they welcomed the change to what

they saw were more civilized modes of transport. Some BME languages do not even have an expression for 'recreational walking'.

Other reasons why BME people may not walk for recreation:

- it is not in their culture
- family commitments
- financial limitations
- lack of knowledge
- may be willing, but do not know how to go about getting there
- a willingness to travel to local parks, but far less likely to use country parks and the countryside.

There are several nationwide schemes that have been set up to tackle the under-representation of BME groups in outdoor recreation. Walk 2000 routes have been established in every ward in Birmingham to encourage people to walk in their local parks. These led walks have been immensely successful in introducing people to walking in their local area.

The aim of the RoWIP is to consider outreach programmes that will investigate the ways BME groups use the outdoors, to help break down barriers, and to highlight the benefits that research has drawn out. Specific needs will need to be identified at an early stage, in order to find the

most appropriate ways to cater for a wide range of users and cultures.



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