



West Berkshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2023 – 2033

Evidence Report 1
Network and Needs Analysis
FINAL July 2023



WestBerkshire
C O U N C I L

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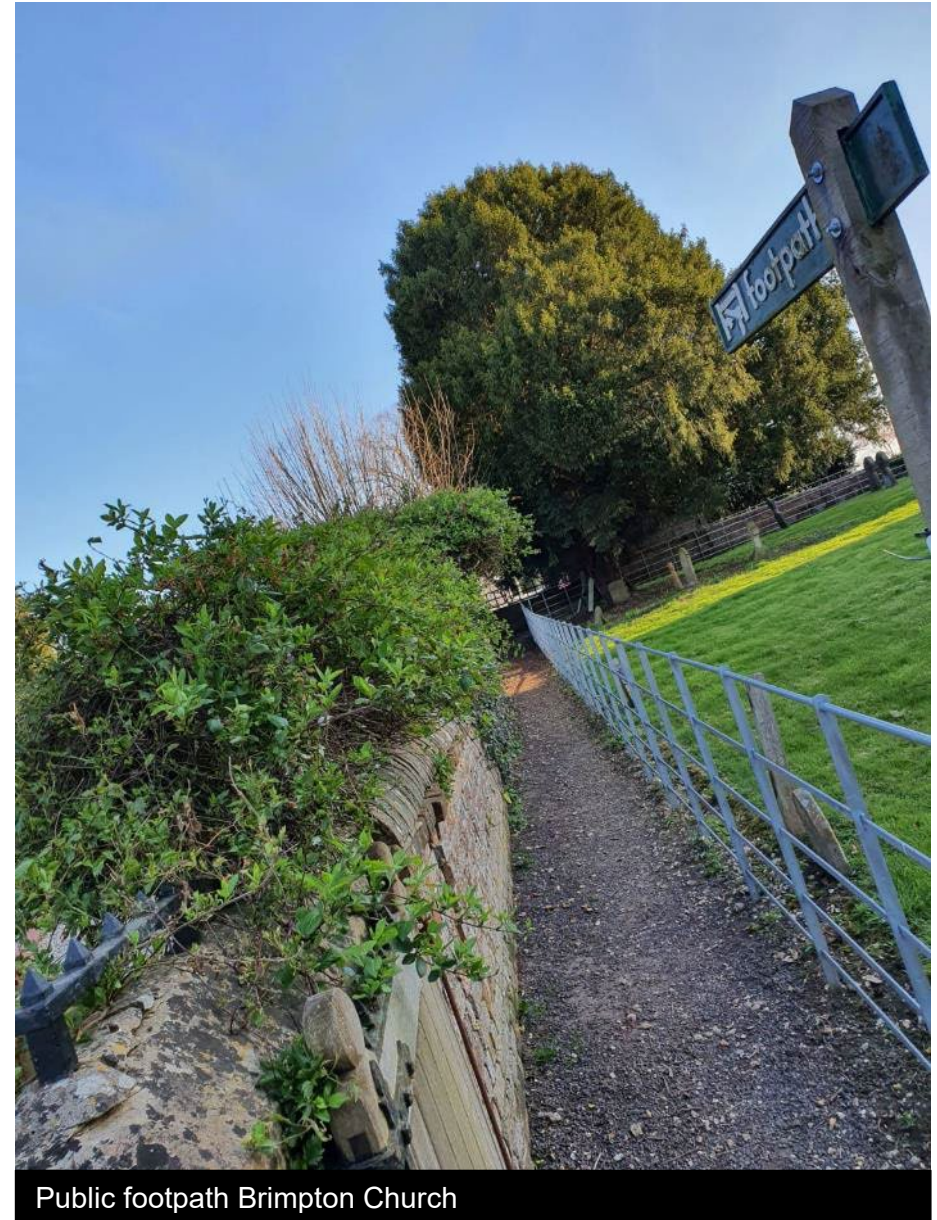
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Introduction

Every local highway authority must, by law, produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan. It sets out the council's strategic goals and priorities for public rights of way.

This Rights of Way Improvement Plans must carry out a full assessment of the needs of the public in using public rights of way, now and in the future. This report contains evidence to underpin the assessment of needs. It should be read in conjunction with the second evidence report - Evidence Report 2 – Surveys and Stakeholders Report.



Public footpath Brimpton Church

West Berkshire's Access Resource

West Berkshire's Public Rights of Way Network

There are four types of public right of way:

- **Public footpaths** – a public right of way only for pedestrians (including dog walkers, users of wheelchairs, mobility scooters and people with buggies);
- **Public bridleways** – As per public footpaths, and in addition can be used horse riders and cyclists;
- **Restricted byways** – As per public footpaths and bridleways, and in addition can be used by horse-drawn carriage drivers;
- **Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs)** – a public right of way for all users, including motor vehicles.

West Berkshire's public rights of way network is shown in Plan 1.

The total length of the network is 740 miles (1192 km). Most of the network (61%) is comprised of public footpaths, with 18% of the network comprised of bridleways, 8% of restricted byways and 14% of byways open to all traffic (BOATs).

The density of public rights of way varies across West Berkshire. The average is 1.69 km per square km. The highest density of public rights of way, calculated by ward, is in Bucklebury Ward. The average length of public right of way per person is 7.52 m. Downlands Ward has the

greatest length of public right of way per person and Hungerford and Kintbury Ward has the greatest total length of public rights of way.

Table 1: West Berkshire's Public Rights of Way Network

	Km	Miles	%	% - National Network
Length all PROW (km)	1192	740	100%	
Footpath	725	451	61%	78%
BOAT	167	104	14%	3%
Bridleway	209	130	18%	17%
Restricted Byway	91	56	7%	2%
All 'higher status' (bridleways, restricted byways and BOATs)	467	290	39%	22%
Average density – km per square km	1.69 km			
Average metres of PROW per person	7.52 m			

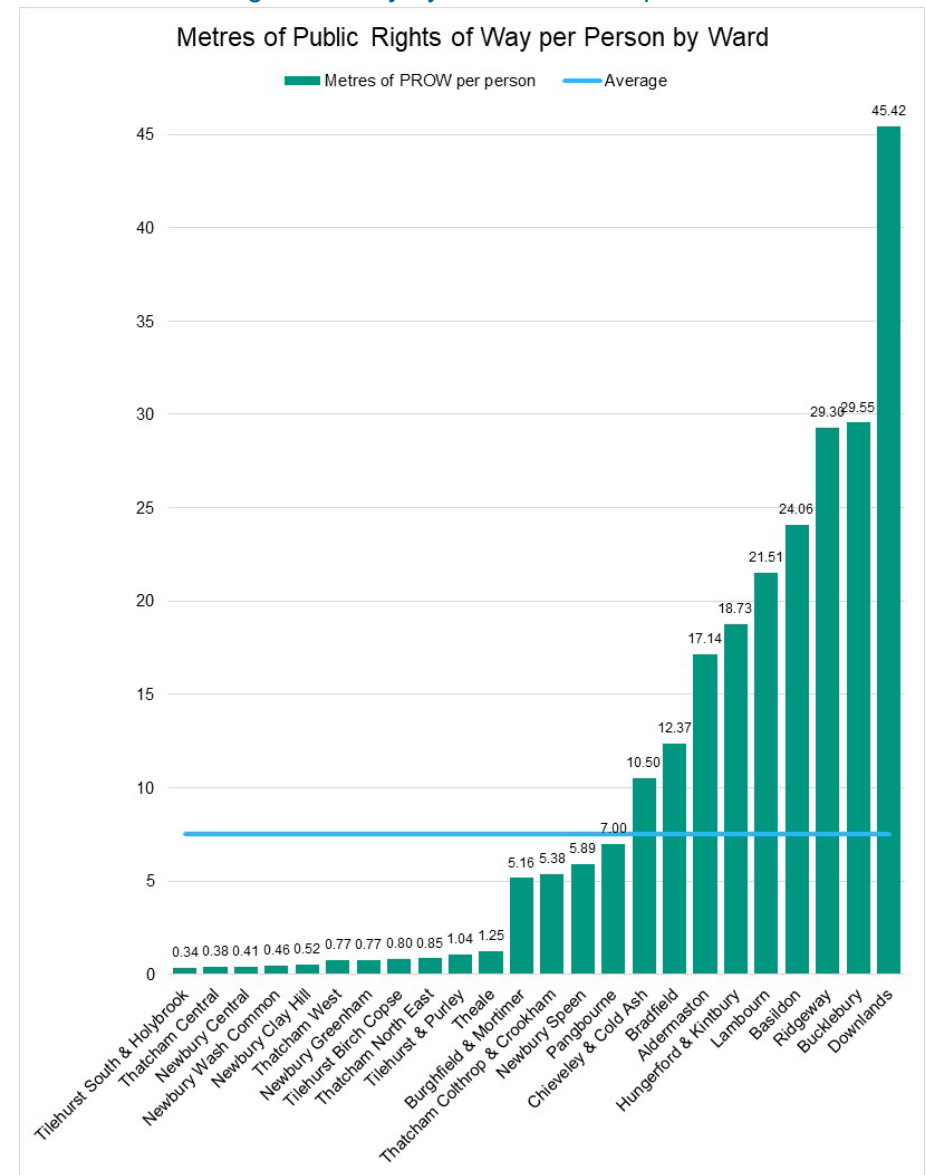
The lowest amount of public rights of way per person are, as would be expected, in the main areas of concentrated population – Newbury and the Kennet Valley, through to the outskirts of Reading. This network will be the most intensely used, serving a high resident population.

Table 2 shows calculations by ward, with wards scoring above average in green and the highest value in dark green and the lowest in red. See also Plans 2 and 3.

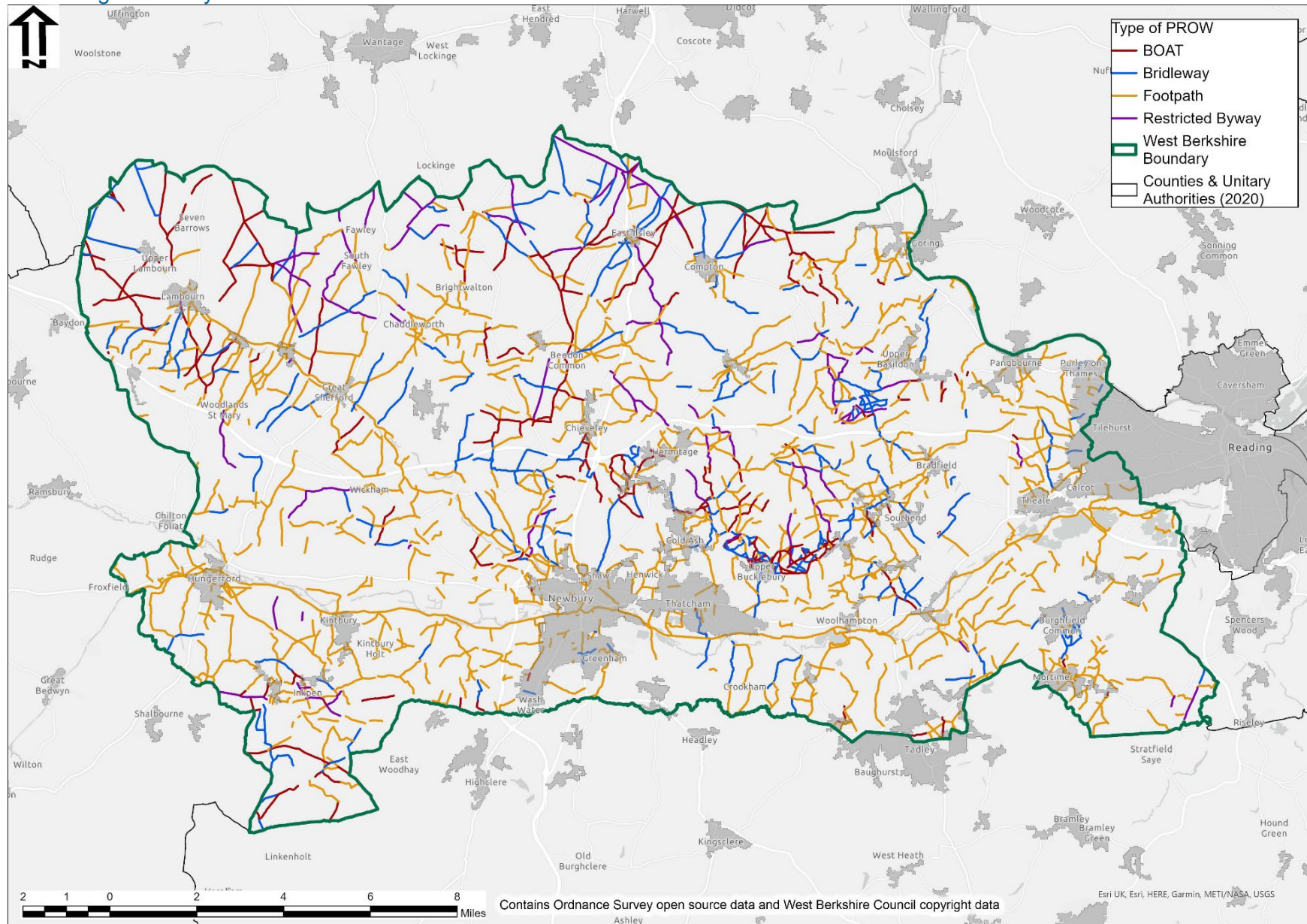
Table 2: Distribution of Public Rights of Way by Ward

Ward	Population (mid-term estimate 2020)	Metres of PROW per person	Density (km / sq. km)	Length of PROW (km)
Bucklebury	3606	29.55	3.00	106.56
Thatcham Central	7959	0.38	2.34	3.01
Newbury Central	7803	0.41	2.08	3.24
Chieveley & Cold Ash	8188	10.50	1.99	85.93
Pangbourne	3801	7.00	1.93	26.61
Tilehurst Birch Copse	7654	0.80	1.84	6.14
Basildon	3539	24.06	1.83	85.15
Ridgeway	4191	29.30	1.80	122.80
Newbury Clay Hill	7323	0.52	1.80	3.80
Newbury Speen	7266	5.89	1.76	42.76
Tilehurst & Purley	10336	1.04	1.72	10.76
Downlands	3647	45.42	1.72	165.65
Thatcham West	7209	0.77	1.71	5.52
Aldermaston	3828	17.14	1.70	65.62
Hungerford & Kintbury	11361	18.73	1.53	212.80
Lambourn	4237	21.51	1.51	91.15
Bradfield	4408	12.37	1.38	54.51
Burghfield & Mortimer	10429	5.16	1.31	53.78
Thatcham North East	7898	0.85	1.29	6.69
Thatcham Colthrop & Crookham	2747	5.38	1.21	14.77
Theale	2946	1.25	1.01	3.69
Newbury Greenham	12213	0.77	0.86	9.43
Tilehurst South & Holybrook	7027	0.34	0.83	2.40
Newbury Wash Common	8849	0.46	0.80	4.11

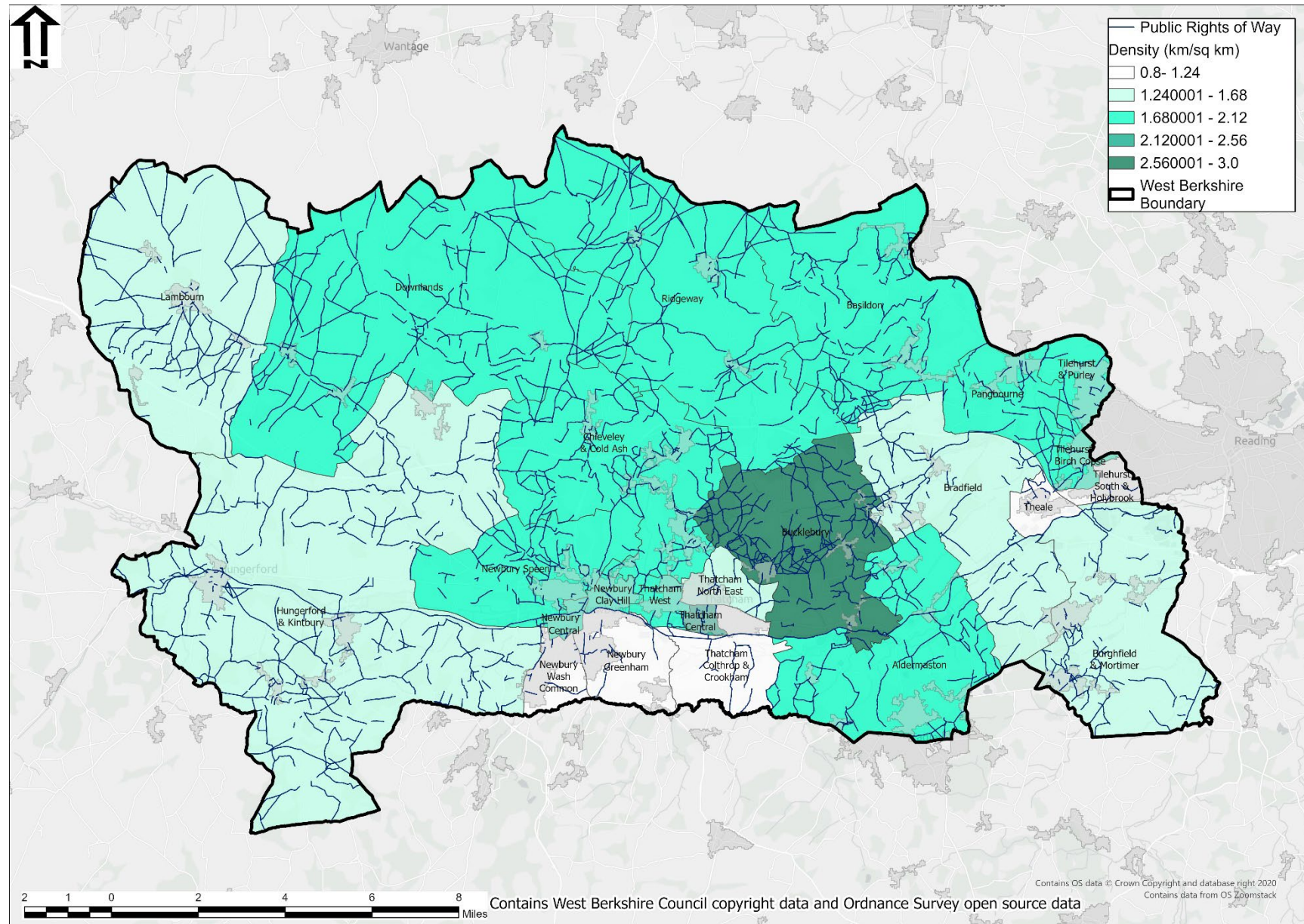
Chart 1: Public Rights of Way by Ward - Metres per Person



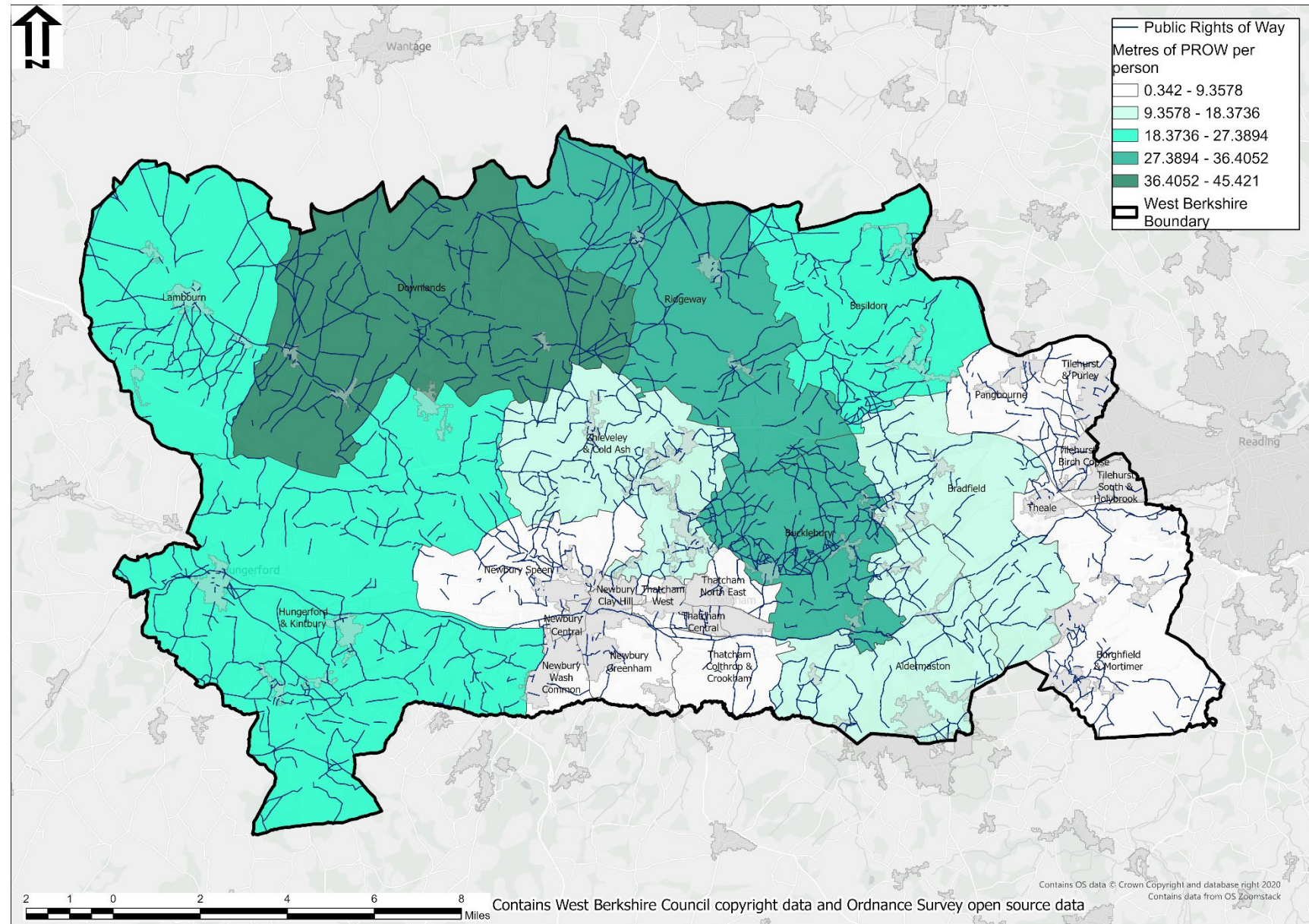
Plan 1: Public Rights of Way Network



Plan 2: Public Rights of Way by Ward - Density km / square km



Plan 3: Public Rights of Way by Ward - Metres of PROW per Person



'Higher Status' Routes

Only bridleways, BOATs and restricted byways can be used by equestrians and cyclists. In West Berkshire these form 39% of the network. Carriage drivers can only use restricted byways and BOATs (22% of the network) and motorised vehicles can only use BOATs (14%). This level of provision is higher than in other areas. In Oxfordshire they form 35% of the network, in Buckinghamshire 22% and in Hampshire 28%.

Table 3: BOATs, Restricted Byways and Bridleways

	West Berkshire % of the network	Hampshire ¹	Oxfordshire ²	Buckinghamshire ³	% - National Network ⁴
Footpath	61%	72%	66%	81%	78%
BOAT	14%	6%	2%	1%	3%
Bridleway	18%	17%	24%	18%	17%
Restricted Byway	8%	5%	8%	1%	2%
All 'higher status'	39%	28%	35%	22%	22%

These public rights of way are not spread evenly across West Berkshire. There are more in the northern rural area and fewer in the Kennet Valley and urban areas. Plan 4 shows the length by ward and the percentage of the network by ward is shown in Plan 5 and Table 4. Ridgeway Ward has the greatest length and Lambourn Ward the highest percentage of the network. Newbury Central, Newbury Clay Hill, Thatcham West, Theale and Tilehurst South and Holybrook wards do not have any 'high status' public rights of way.

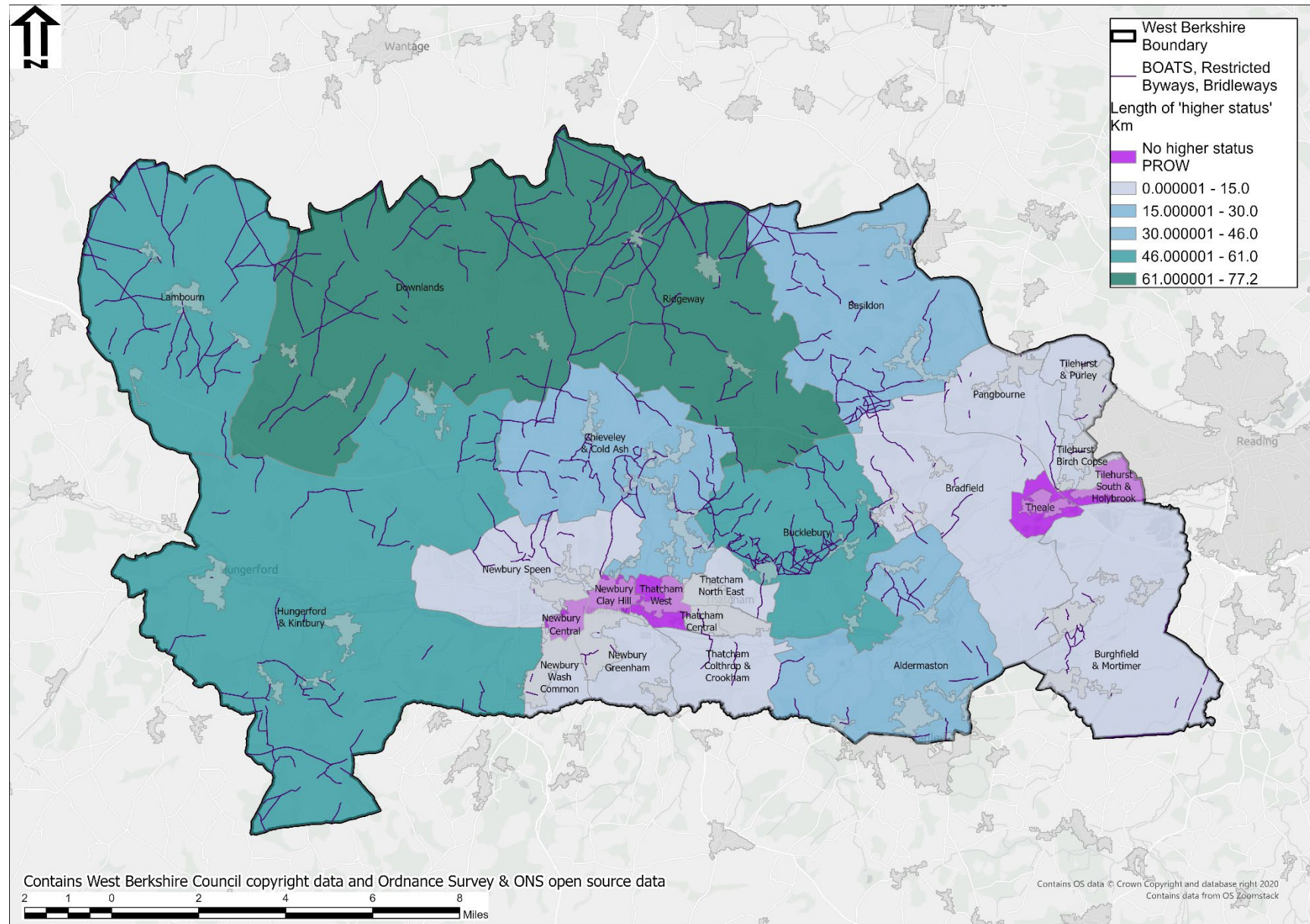
Plan 6 shows the road network major roads. Connections across some roads, e.g. the M4 and A34, are in place in several locations.

However, there are other busy major roads, e.g. the A4, which did not benefit from the installation of bridges or underpasses at the time of construction. Increasing traffic can be an issue, especially for equestrians. Minor roads should carry less traffic; however, some of these routes are likely to be busier and used as 'rat-runs'

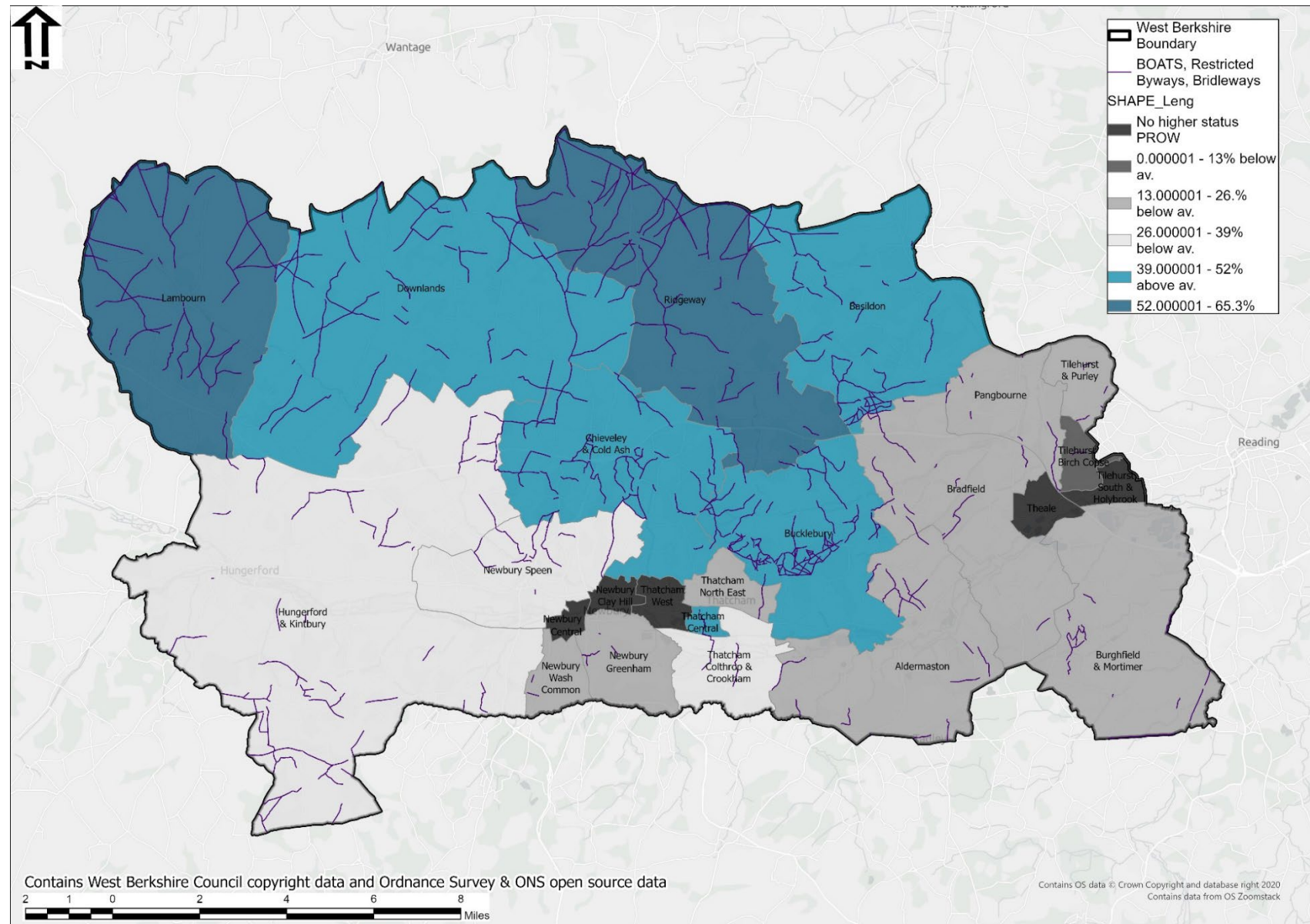
Table 4: Summary of 'Higher Status' Public Rights of Way by Ward

Ward	Higher status (km)	% of network
Aldermaston	15.13	23.1
Basildon	39.51	46.4
Bradfield	12.88	23.6
Bucklebury	52.31	49.1
Burghfield & Mortimer	9.12	17.0
Chieveley & Cold Ash	41.86	48.7
Downlands	72.62	43.8
Hungerford & Kintbury	56.28	26.4
Lambourn	59.48	65.3
Newbury Central	0.00	0.0
Newbury Clay Hill	0.00	0.0
Newbury Greenham	1.57	16.7
Newbury Speen	12.16	28.4
Newbury Wash Common	0.72	17.4
Pangbourne	4.68	17.6
Ridgeway	77.18	62.9
Thatcham Central	1.34	44.7
Thatcham Colthrop & Crookham	3.93	26.6
Thatcham North East	1.30	19.4
Thatcham West	0.00	0.0
Theale	0.00	0.0
Tilehurst & Purley	1.45	13.5
Tilehurst Birch Copse	0.56	9.2
Tilehurst South & Holybrook	0.00	0.0

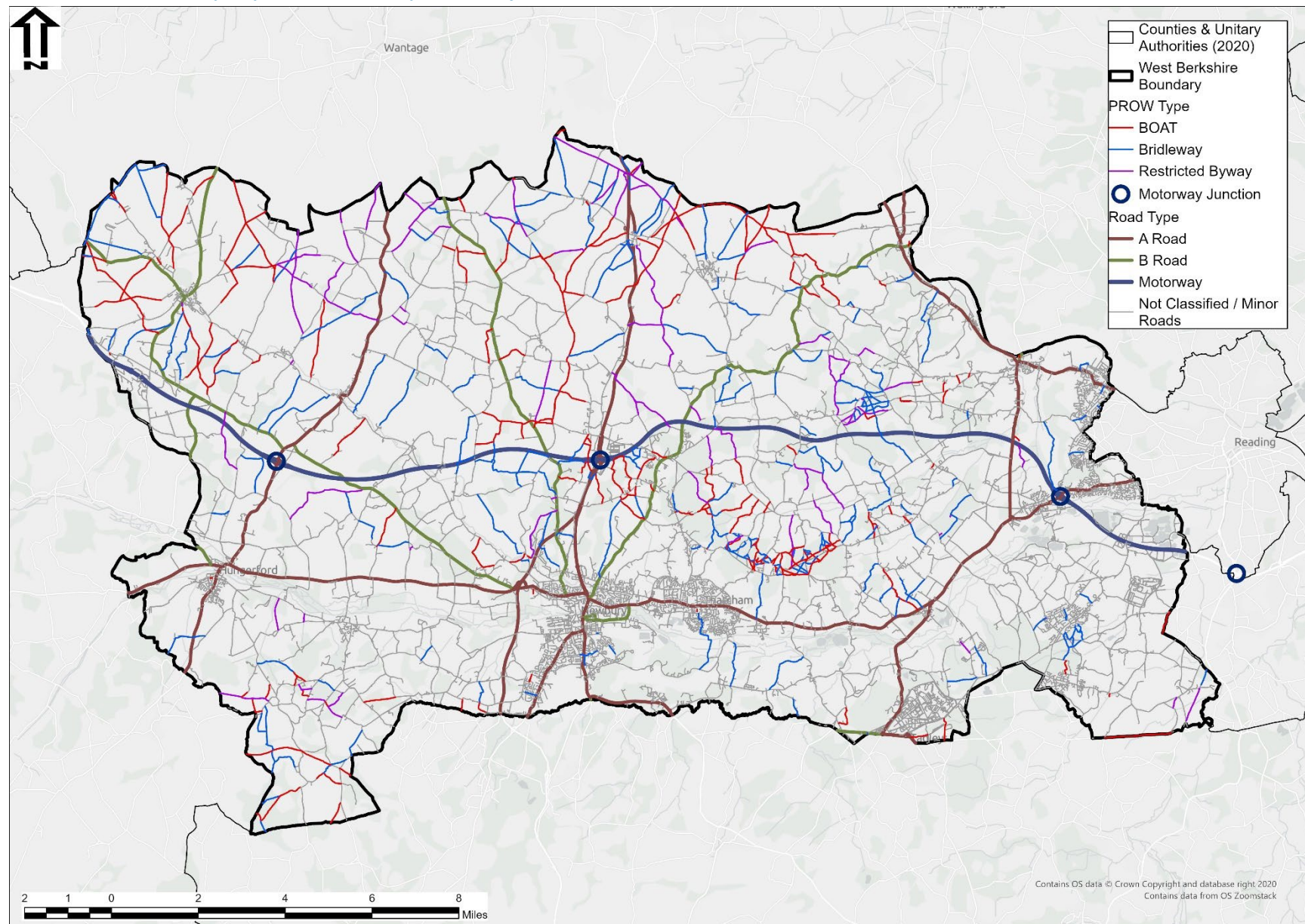
Plan 4: Length of BOATs, Restricted Byways and Bridleways by Ward



Plan 5: Percentage of PROW Network Comprised of BOATs, Restricted Byways and Bridleways by Ward



Plan 6: BOATs, Restricted Byways and Bridleways and Major and Minor Roads



Publicly Accessible Greenspace

When assessing whether people have good access to the countryside it is important to also consider the other open spaces that people can visit. The public rights of way network is part of this wider provision. Information on other areas of publicly accessible greenspace is included here to provide a broader context of the countryside access resource of West Berkshire. These spaces do not fall within the scope of the ROWIP. Assessment of this provision will be included in West Berkshire's forthcoming Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy.

The public have a right of access on foot to land that is recorded as Access Land under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (subject to some restrictions), mapped as 'Access Land'. In West Berkshire, this includes most of the Registered Commons. Some landowners also permit access on their land, generally only on paths.

Plan 7 shows greenspace. This has been compiled West Berkshire Green Infrastructure mapping, Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act) open access land⁵ and National Trust land which is always open. This mapping includes areas which are accessible to the public and spaces which have some limits on their accessibility.

Some notable accessible spaces are:

- [Snelmore Common Country Park](#)⁶ – this site to the north of Newbury is designated as a country park, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Snelmore Common contains a range of habitats including heathland, wet mires and woodland making it home to nationally rare bird species including nightjar, woodlark and tree pipit. There are several waymarked routes for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians as well as public rights of way.
- [Greenham and Crookham Commons](#)⁷ – This is an extensive area of heathland and woodland and includes the site of the former Greenham Common Air Base. It is now rich in wildlife and much of the area is a SSSI. The southern parts of the commons are CROW Act Land and are therefore accessible. The plateau and the areas of the former runways are flat and very accessible for those with mobility impairments. There are several walking guides.
- [Kennet and Avon Canal](#)⁸ – The Kennet and Avon Canal runs from east to west across the whole of West Berkshire. Entering West Berkshire on from the outskirts of Reading, it passes through Newbury, Kintbury and Hungerford before continuing west to Bristol. All of the route is a public footpath and is available for pedestrians. Cyclists can also use large sections of the route.
- [Bucklebury Common](#)⁹ – Around Bucklebury are extensive areas of common land, privately owned by Bucklebury Estate but which is also accessible as CROW Act access land. There is also the highest density of public rights of way in this area. Some of these are Local Wildlife Sites and are managed for their nature conservation interest of heathlands, ancient woodland and greens.
- [Wokefield Common](#)¹⁰ - Wokefield Common is a tranquil site with a good network of paths that lead through tall pine and broadleaf woodland, past ponds, heather and rich wet gullies.
- [Padworth Common](#)¹¹ - Padworth Common nature reserve is a tranquil haven for wildlife with heathland, woodland, ponds and alder-lined gullies. It has areas of heathland and supports rare species.

- Discovery Centre Thatcham¹² – The Nature Discovery Centre, situated next to lakes formed by gravel extraction, now offers the chance to see a range of wildfowl and other wildlife. It is a family destination with a café, playground, picnic facilities and toilets, with a wildlife trail and events throughout the year.
- Hungerford Common and Hungerford Marsh¹³ - Hungerford Common, or Common Port Down, is 220 acres (89 hectares) of ancient common land, pasture, mature trees and canal, to the east of Hungerford. The common is also CRow Act access land. To the west of Hungerford town is Hungerford Marsh Nature Reserve. This site has pasture, marshland and a chalk stream river and is a Site of Special Scientific Interest due to its importance for wildlife.
- Paices Wood Country Park¹⁴ - This privately owned country park on a former gravel extraction near Aldermaston has a mixture of lakes and woodlands for visitors to enjoy, and fishing by permit.
- Hosehill Lake¹⁵ - A beautiful lake surrounded by meadows, ponds and sheltered reedbeds
- Lardon Chase, the Holies and Lough Down¹⁶ – these sites near Streatley, overlooking the Goring Gap, are owned by the National Trust. Parts of these sites are also CRow Act access land.
- Holybrook and Southcote Linear Parks are important greenspaces close to Reading, within the Kennet Valley.

There are other extensive former gravel extraction sites along the Kennet valley. Many of these are now accessible for recreation, some through paid entry; for sailing, fishing and enjoying wildlife.

Access to Woodland

Woodland is important in the landscape of West Berkshire. There are concentrations and large blocks of woodland in the areas north of Thatcham, particularly around Bucklebury, and in the area from Bucklebury to the north east to Pangbourne, Upper Basildon and Goring. There are also many woodlands, and some larger blocks, in the Kennet Valley. Woodland is an important landscape feature across the northern rural downland where there are many smaller woodlands, many of which are ancient. There are large areas of plantation woodlands in the south east of the district around Aldermaston, Padworth and Burghfield Common. Public rights of way cross these and several have permissive or access by permits.

In all areas, public rights of way are an important way to access woodlands and some of these are accessible as CRow Act land, see Plan 8.

Welfare Value of Public Rights of Way

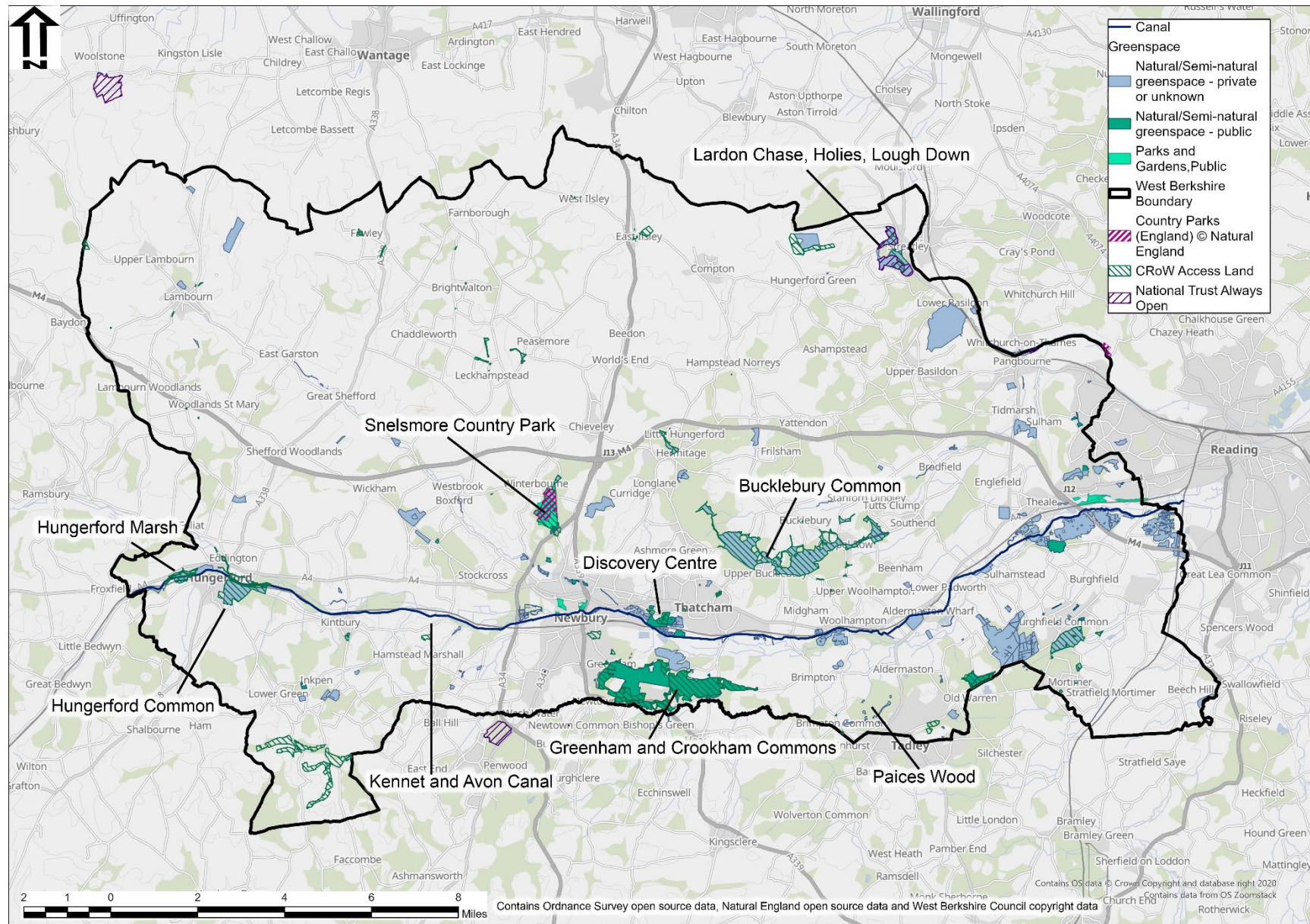
The ORVal Tool's¹⁷ primary purpose is to provide information that might be useful to government, businesses and communities in understanding the benefits that are derived from accessible greenspace in England and Wales. As well as including greenspace sites, ORVal includes part of the public rights of way network.

The ORVal Tool uses a statistical model to predict the number of visits made by adults to greenspaces (including paths). The model adjusts its predictions according to a range of factors, most particularly the socioeconomic characteristics of residents and qualities of alternative greenspaces. The tool calculates a 'welfare' value for each

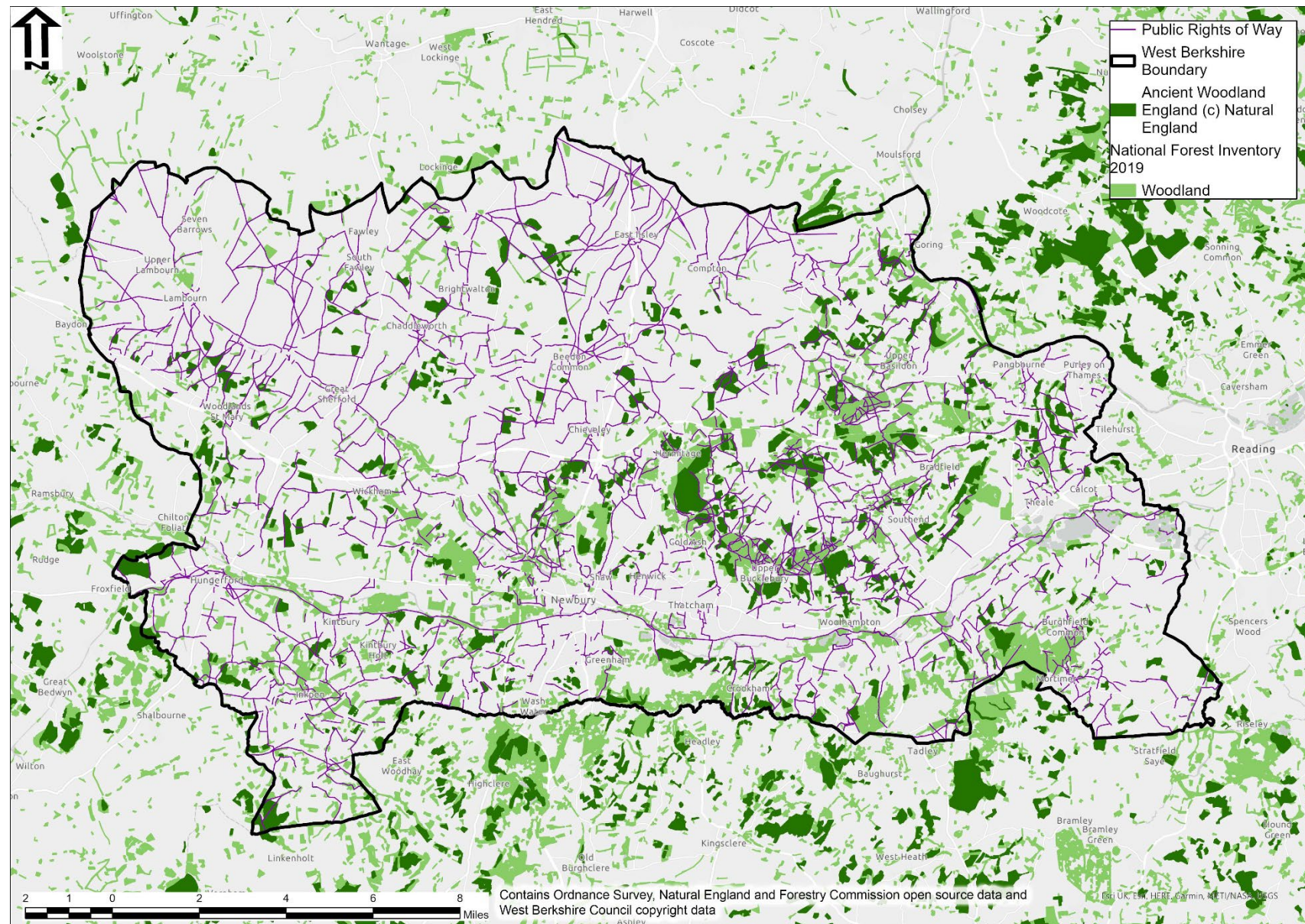
greenspace, defined by the tool developers as the sense of well-being or utility that the individual feels from their experience. This 'welfare value' describes the monetary equivalent of the welfare enjoyed by individuals as a result of having access to a greenspace. In economics this welfare value is often alternatively called an 'economic value' or a 'willingness to pay'. Welfare values for an existing site are estimated by calculating how much each individual's welfare would fall if they were no longer able to access that site and then converting that welfare quantity into an equivalent monetary amount. Welfare values are useful for decision-makers in applying cost-benefit analysis to appraise projects that impact on greenspace.

The total welfare value of all greenspace (including paths) in West Berkshire is calculated at £27,133,736 per annum, with an estimated 8,502,350 visits per year. However, this is an underestimate, as much of the public rights of way network was not included in the mapping used by the model, see Plan 9.

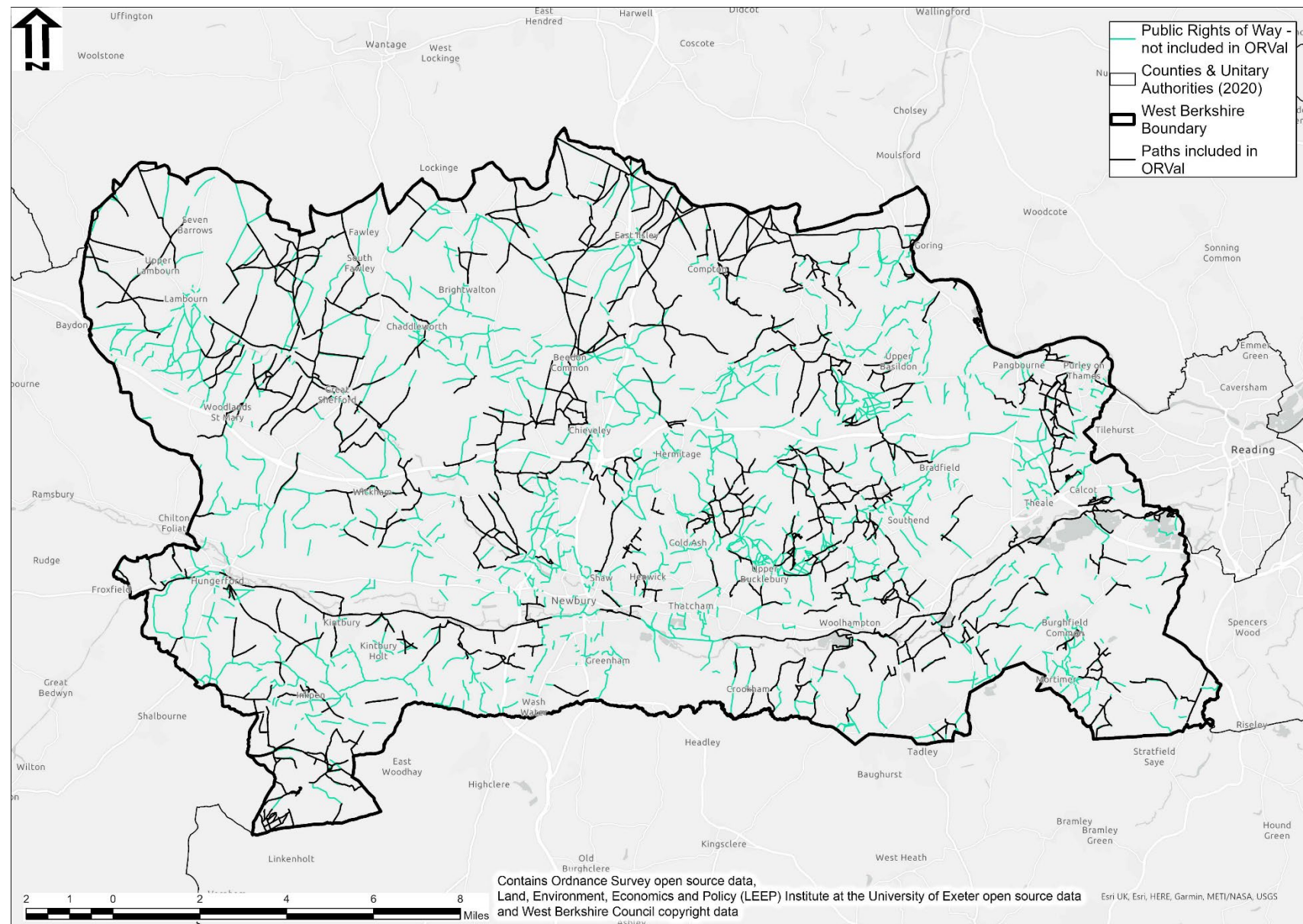
Plan 7: Publicly Accessible Natural and Semi-natural Greenspaces



Plan 8: Woodland and Public Rights of Way



Plan 9: ORVal Tool Output



Cross Boundary Links

West Berkshire is adjacent to five highways authorities:

- Oxfordshire
- Hampshire County Council
- Reading
- Wokingham
- Wiltshire
- Swindon is in close proximity

Public rights of way connections across the boundaries with these local authorities are generally good.

There are some settlements close to or crossing the boundary with West Berkshire.

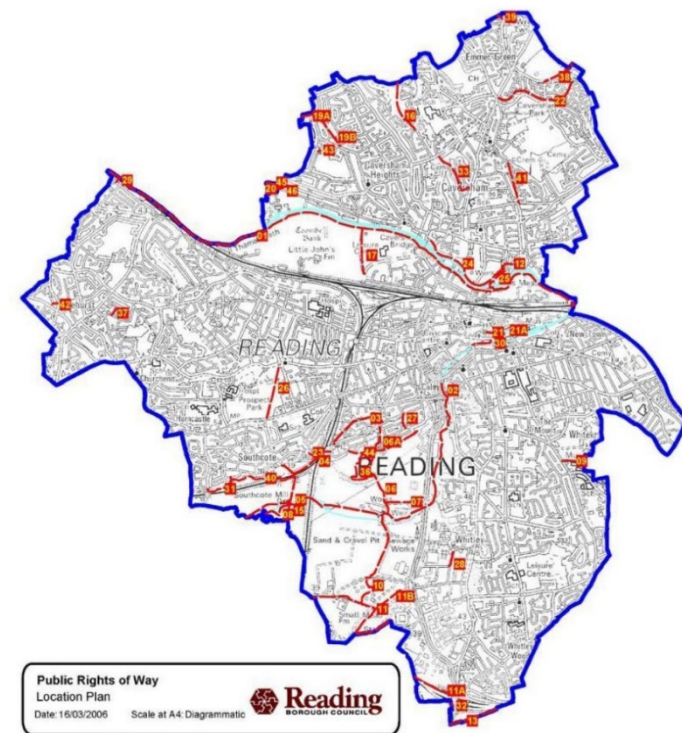
Goring-on-Thames (Oxfordshire) and Streatley (West Berkshire) are two settlements divided by the River Thames, as are Pangbourne (West Berkshire) and Whitchurch-on-Thames (Oxfordshire). The smaller settlement of Tadley lies on the boundary with West Berkshire but is located in Hampshire. In all of these places, the public rights of way network in West Berkshire provides a resource for residents outside of West Berkshire.

The most significant area of cross-boundary settlement is with Reading. Some areas geographically now form part of the western side of Reading (the 'Eastern Urban Area' of Western Berkshire) and are contiguous with the town, even though they fall within West Berkshire. Kentwood, Tilehurst, Churchend and Southcote all lie adjacent to West Berkshire. These areas have some areas of higher

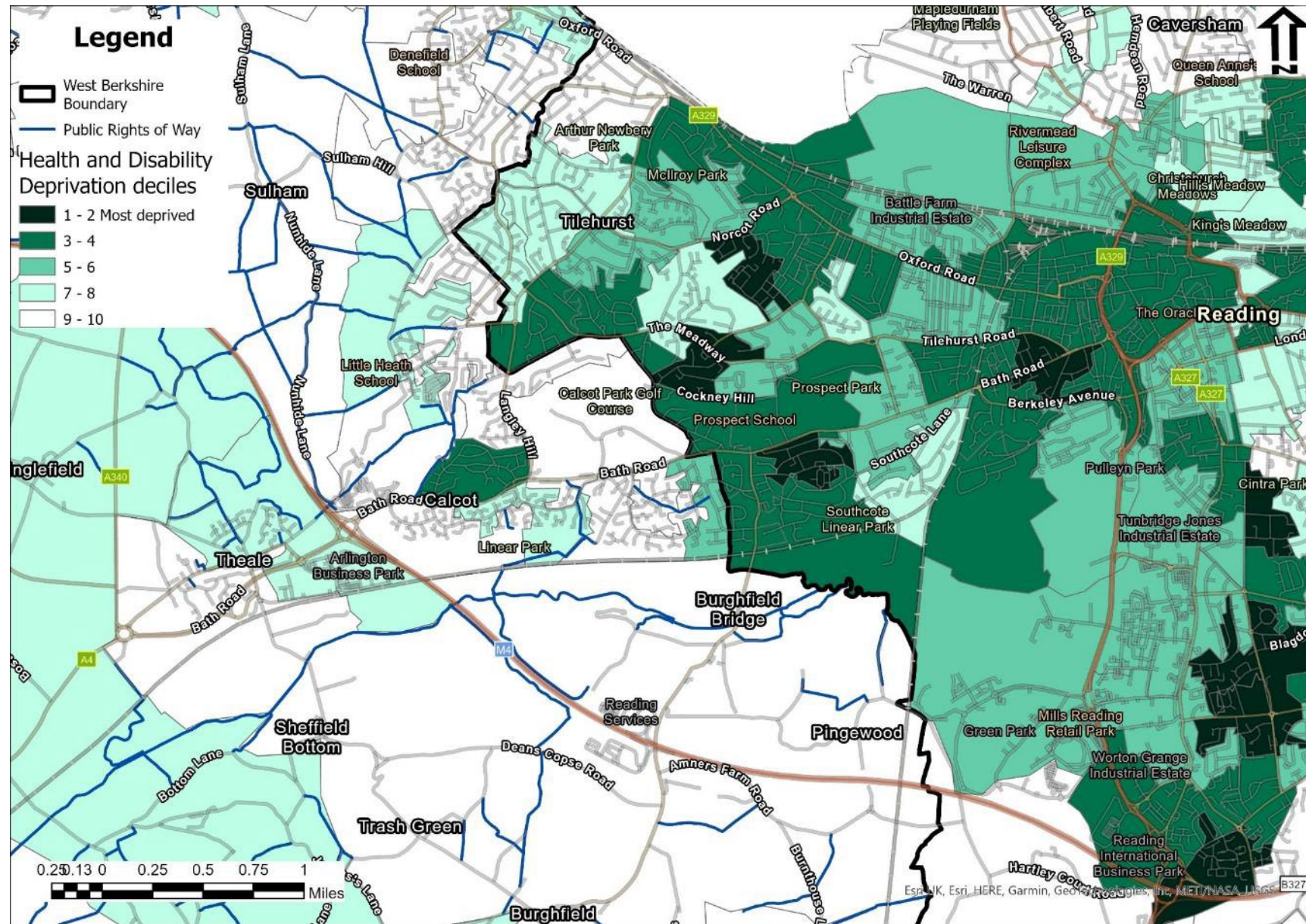
deprivation, see Plan 11. There is also a low level of public rights of way in this area, see Plan 10.

The valley of the River Kennet links West Berkshire and Reading and is an important recreational area. Holybrook and Southcote Linear Parks are important greenspaces and the Kennet and Avon Canal passes through this area. Former gravel extraction areas also provide recreational facilities. To the north, the countryside to the west of Calcot and Purley on Thames, around Sulham, is a resource for residents from Reading.

Plan 10: Public Rights of Way Reading¹⁸



Plan 11: Cross-boundary Area - West Reading / West Berkshire Eastern Urban Area



Promoted Routes and where to find Information

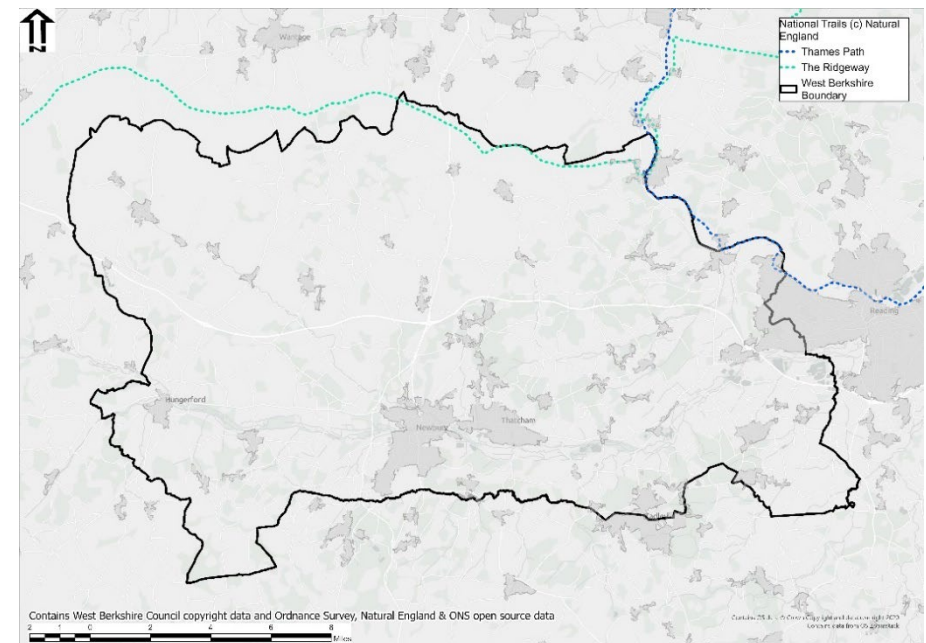
National Trails

Parts of the Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails pass through West Berkshire, see Plan 12. These have been incorporated into the King Alfred's Way long distance cycle route.

A survey of national trail users was carried out in 2014¹⁹ which reveals more information about users of the two trails:

- Walking, either with or without a dog, was the most popular activity (91% for the Ridgeway and 81% for the Thames Path);
- There were more cyclists using the Thames Path than the average for all trails – 17% vs. 8% - making the Thames Path National Trail with the second highest cycling use, after the Pennine Way;
- Both trails had higher usage by local visitors than the average for all trails – 54% of Thames Path and 74% of Ridgeway visitors originated from within 10 miles, compared with 46% for all trails;
- 40% of Thames Path users and 27% of Ridgeway users visited the trail once a week or more frequently compared to 24% for all trails;
- Average spend per head was lower than the average for all trails (£6.64), at £3.09 for the Ridgeway and £5.13 for the Thames Path, with the largest item spending on accommodation, followed by food and drink.

Plan 12: Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails



Recreational Routes

The Lambourn Valley Way recreational route goes from Uffington Castle in Oxfordshire to Newbury. The Wayfarers Walk crosses the southern part of the District, and the Test Valley Way starts from Combe Gibbet.

The Ordnance Survey Explorer 1:25,000 maps show nine Berkshire Circular Routes. West Berkshire Council has in the past produced printed leaflets for these walks. However, these leaflets are no longer available, and the pdf versions are very difficult to find online and not suitable for printing at home.

Routes Promoted by West Berkshire Council

West Berkshire Council Public Rights of Way Service promotes a range of routes on its website. These are listed under the public rights of way pages at <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/countrysideroutes>. There are 22 promoted routes listed. Some of these promoted routes are quite old and West Berkshire Council itself has not produced any new promotional material for several years.

Some of these are 'Walking in West Berkshire' leaflets produced by West Berkshire Council, along with a range of other leaflets and a route for equestrians.

- Bradfield - Walking in West Berkshire Leaflet
- Compton - Walking in West Berkshire Leaflet
- Downland Villages - Route for Walking, Riding and Cycling
- East and West Ilsley - Walking in West Berkshire Leaflet
- Ilsley Downs - Riding Route
- Inkpen - Walking in West Berkshire Leaflet
- Lambourn Valley Way - A Walk from the Whitehorse Hill to Newbury
- Mortimer - Walking in West Berkshire Leaflet
- Speen Moors - Walking
- Stanford Dingley - Walking in West Berkshire Leaflet
- Sulham Valley - Walking in West Berkshire Leaflet
- Wash Common - Walking in West Berkshire Leaflet

There are also a series of parish walk leaflets which show all public rights of way in the parish.

- Ashampstead - Footpaths, Bridleways and Byways
- Basildon - Footpaths, Bridleways and Byways
- Bucklebury - Footpaths, Bridleways and Byways
- Chieveley - Footpaths, Bridleways and Byways
- Frilsham - Footpaths, Bridleways and Byways
- Hampstead Norries (Haw Farm) - Footpaths, Bridleways and Byways
- Hermitage - Footpaths, Bridleways and Byways
- Inkpen - Two Circular Walks
- Streatley - Footpaths, Bridleways and Byways
- Yattendon - Footpaths, Bridleways and Byways

All public rights of way can be viewed on West Berkshire Council's online map.²⁰ This also shows 'recreational routes', mainly the Walking in West Berkshire leaflets, along with the two National Trails, see Plan 13.

Some of the leaflets available for download are not on the online map:

- Bradfield - Walking in West Berkshire Leaflet
- Compton - Walking in West Berkshire Leaflet
- Ilsley Downs - Riding Route
- Speen Moors - Walking
- Stanford Dingley - Walking in West Berkshire Leaflet
- None of the parish walk leaflets have been digitised as these promote the entire public rights of way network in the parish rather than discrete routes.

There are two routes shown on the online map for which no leaflet is available to download – Aldermaston / Padworth and Thatcham Living Landscapes.

Walking and cycling maps have also been produced for the main settlements in West Berkshire.²¹ There are five walking maps which show road crossing points, underpasses and short-cuts, with routes colour-coded to show the suitability of paths for all users.

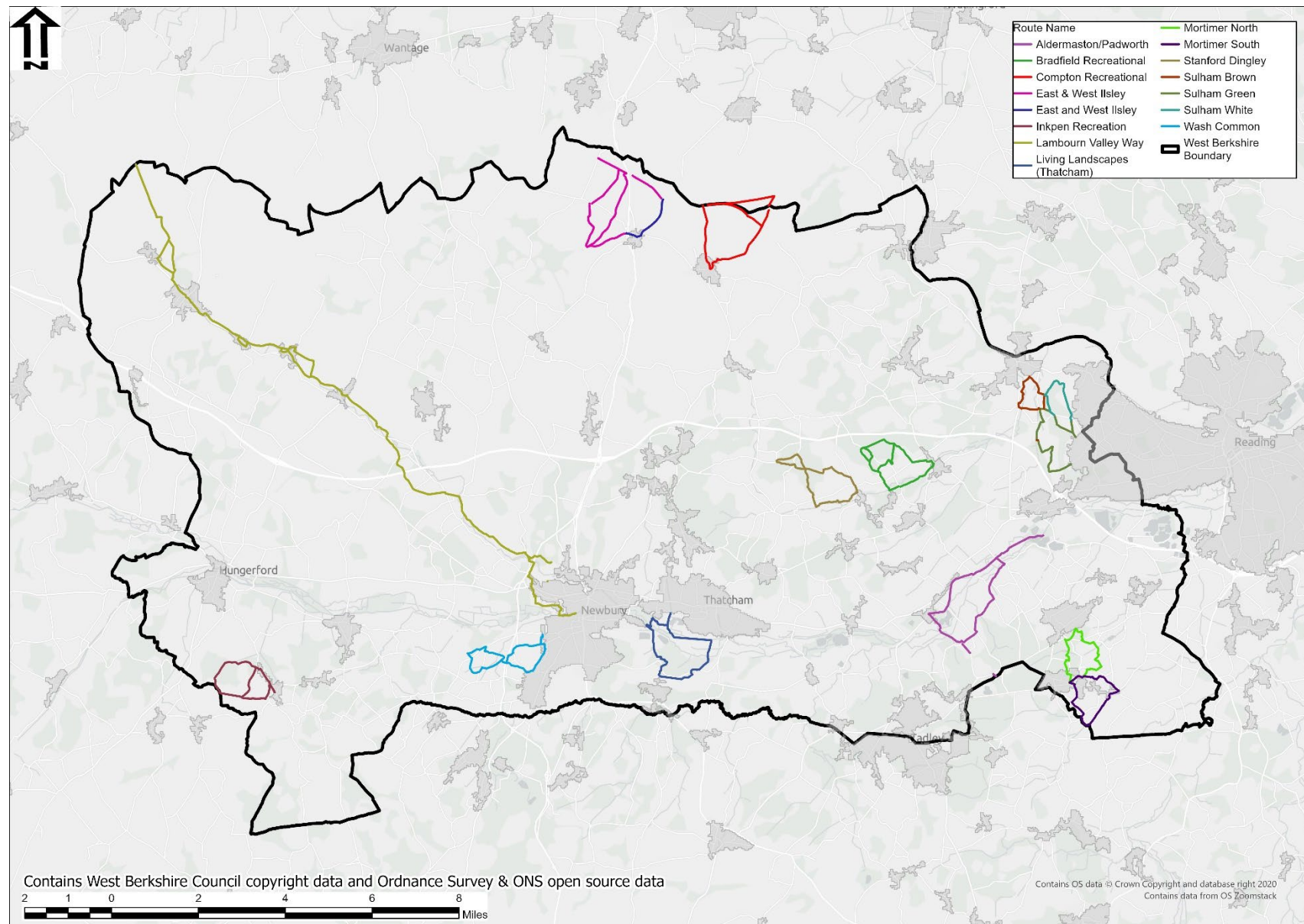
- Newbury
- Thatcham
- Theale and Calcot
- Tilehurst and Purley-on-Thames
- Bradfield

There are also six cycling routes:

- Route 1 - Burghclere and Kingsclere
- Route 2 - Bucklebury, Bradfield, Yattendon and Hermitage
- Route 2 - Boxford, Welford and Kintbury
- Route 4 - Marsh Benham and Hungerford
- Route 5 - Curridge, Chieveley and Boxford
- Route 6 - Pangbourne and Whitchurch

In addition, Reading Borough Council has published Reading Cycle Routes, a comprehensive cycling map of their area, extending into West Berkshire including Calcot, Tilehurst and Purley.²²

Plan 13: Recreational Routes on West Berkshire Council Online Map



Information on Walking

There is a wide range of information and web sources to support people wanting to walk. Only a selection can be included here.

A Google search of “circular walks West Berkshire”²³ returned the following top five results:

- 1 West Berkshire Ramblers;²⁴
- 2 Berkshire Muddy Stilettos;²⁵
- 3 West Berks Villagers.com;²⁶
- 4 West Berkshire Council – walking and cycling routes (transport pages not Public Rights of Way Service pages);²⁷
- 5 Alltrails.com Frilsham Village and Woodlands Circular Walk.²⁸

The transport pages of West Berkshire Council’s website were ranked fourth. These pages provide downloadable cycling routes in the form of leaflets and .gpx files. Walking maps for Newbury, Thatcham, Theale and Calcot, Tilehurst and Purley-on-Thames and Bradfield are also downloadable. The page links through the Public Rights of Way Service pages.

West Berkshire Council’s public rights of way service did not feature in the search results.²⁹ This lack of online visibility was reflected in the public survey results, with only 25% of respondents aware of this material. A large majority of people, 73%, had not used any of the circular walk leaflets on the website. The most used route, the Lambourn Valley Way, had only been used by 11% of respondents.

Several local and national websites carry information on routes, but there is not one single source to which users can go. A selection is provided here but this is not the full list of sources.

- West Berkshire Ramblers (ranked first in Google search)
<https://www.wberksramblers.org.uk/information/local-walking.html>
Links to West Berkshire Council’s Public Rights of Way Service leaflet download pages and other sources of information, e.g., West Berkshire Countryside Society, National Trust, the Kennet and Avon Canal and National Trails, as well as sources of information outside of West Berkshire.
- West Berkshire Countryside Society
https://www.westberkscountryside.org.uk/walk_leaflets.html
There are 21 walks produced by the West Berkshire Countryside Society listed on their website, available to download.



- Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT)
<https://www.bbowt.org.uk/>
<https://www.bbowt.org.uk/wildlife/living-landscapes/west-berkshire-living-landscape>

The wildlife trust carries details of walks at Greenham Common and Thatcham as part of the Living Landscapes project as well as visitor information for the sites they manage.

- National Trust
<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lists/countryside-around-berkshire>

The National Trust has details of walks in West Berkshire and neighbouring areas.

- Kennet and Avon Canal
<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/enjoy-the-waterways/canal-and-river-network/kennet-and-avon-canal>

Promoted walks are listed on the Canal and River Trust website.

- Long Distance Walkers Association (LDWA)
<https://ldwa.org.uk/>
 Has an online map of a range of walking routes of varying distance

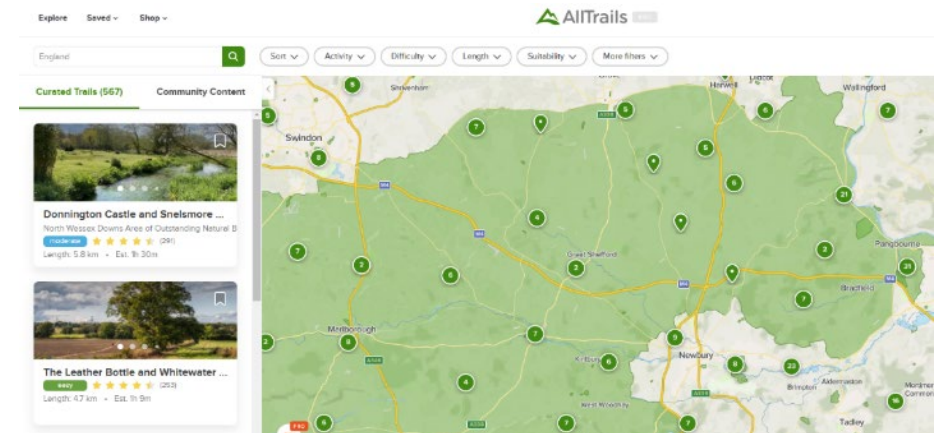
- GPS routes
<http://www.gps-routes.co.uk/>

This website allows users to download .gpx files to follow walking and cycling routes. It lists several routes in West Berkshire.

- walkinginengland.co.uk
<https://www.walkinginengland.co.uk/berks/walks.php>
 This website lists many walks in and around West Berkshire. The site provides a description and basic map.

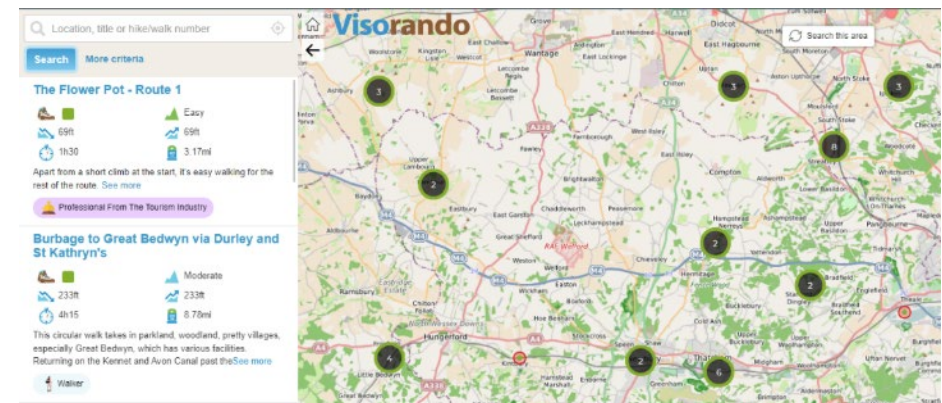
- Alltrails
<https://www.alltrails.com/england/berkshire>

Alltrails carries several hundred trails in Berkshire with maps and directions.



- Visorando
<https://www.visorando.co.uk/>

User-created and verified walks and routes, with downloadable .gpx files. Several routes in West Berkshire.



- fancyfreewalks
<https://fancyfreewalks.org/Berkshire.html>
This site has a selection in southern England, including in Berkshire, with .gpx file downloads.
- Muddy Stilettos
<https://berkshire.muddystilettos.co.uk/things-to-do/20-of-the-best-spring-walks-near-you/>
This site collates 20 walks from various sources, including Alltrails and the National Trust. Several of these are not in West Berkshire (although this source was ranked second in the Google search).

There are several active Facebook groups promoting routes and ideas for visiting the countryside:

- West Berkshire Local Walks - 1.4k members
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/201497961508265>
- Family Walks in Berkshire - 2.6k members
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1194642000911341>
- Berkshire Countryside Walks - 7.5k members
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/554041271662667>

Information on Cycling

There is a wide range of information and web sources to support people wanting to cycle. Only a selection can be included here.

Many of the routes which are listed use the road network rather than public rights of way.

Members of West Berkshire Spokes have developed several recreational routes,³⁰ which are available in digital GPX format from West Berkshire Council's website.³¹ West Berkshire Spokes also has information on other routes on their website.

Newbury Velo list some routes with off-road sections.³²

Sustrans provides information on the National Cycling Network, including routes in West Berkshire, some of which use the public rights of way network.³³

Cycling UK (the Cyclist Touring Club) provides a source of information on clubs and some routes.³⁴

There are many other websites which have suggestions for routes, for example:

- Komoot³⁵
- Alltrails³⁶
- Outdoor Active³⁷

Information on Equestrianism

A Google search of various terms to try to find information on where to ride or drive carriages in West Berkshire did not produce many results directing people to public rights of way. However, a Google search of "bridleways in West Berkshire" returned West Berkshire Council public rights of way website as the top result and the Google search "horse riding routes West Berkshire" returned the promoted route page on West Berkshire Council's website as the top result.³⁸

The Ilsley Downs Riding Route is listed on West Berkshire Council's website.³⁹ There are several publications on the promoted routes page which show all of the public rights of way, including those suitable for equestrians.

The Three Downs Link and Loop is a multi-user route which connects the South Downs Way and The Ridgeway National Trail.

The British Horse Society provides information on rides nationally, including some in West Berkshire.⁴⁰ There are two close to Newbury with the remainder across the central and western downland area:

- Snelsmore Bagnor Ride: An 8km (5 mile) ride from Snelsmore Common to the pretty village of Bagnor (home of the Watermill Theatre) and onto Winterbourne.
- Chieveley Circuit: A 18 km (10 mile) ride using minor roads, bridleways and byways.
- Ilsley Down
- Downland Villages
- Berkshire Downs Rides
- Two Rides on the Berkshire Downs 8km and 25km
- East Ilsley Carriage Driving Route.
- Compton Carriage Driving Route.
- Compton Rides: A series of rides using bridleways, restricted byways and byways, all starting from Churn Rd, Compton.
- East and West Ilsley (8km)
- West Ilsley Circular Carriage Driving Riding Route
- PLAP 13 West Ilsley
- Three Downs Loop
- Letcombe Bassett Circular Carriage Driving Route
- Eastbury Ride

Information on Motorised Vehicles, 4x4 and Trail Bikes

The Trail Riders Fellowship is developing a Green Road Map, which is available for members, with a reduced content version for non-members.⁴¹

The Green Lane Association (GLASS) has information on the types of highways which can be legally used with motorised vehicles.⁴²

Network Condition and Maintenance

There are 740 miles of public rights of way in West Berkshire. On this network there are thousands of structures, including bridges, stiles, steps, gates and many others, as well as the hundreds of miles of surface, see Chart 2.

Maintenance responsibilities are split between the council and landowners, with whom West Berkshire works in partnership.

Condition Survey

A condition survey of the entire public rights of way network was carried out in 2022. The previous survey was carried out in 2009. However, the criteria for assessment were not identical and therefore full comparisons cannot be made between the two surveys to determine how the network has changed over time. The 2022 survey was more detailed and comprehensive than the 2009 survey and therefore the results between the two surveys are not directly comparable.

A summary of the main types of furniture and structures on the public rights of way network is shown in Table 5, along with its condition, as recorded in the 2022 survey.

Chart 2: Furniture and Structures - 2022 Survey

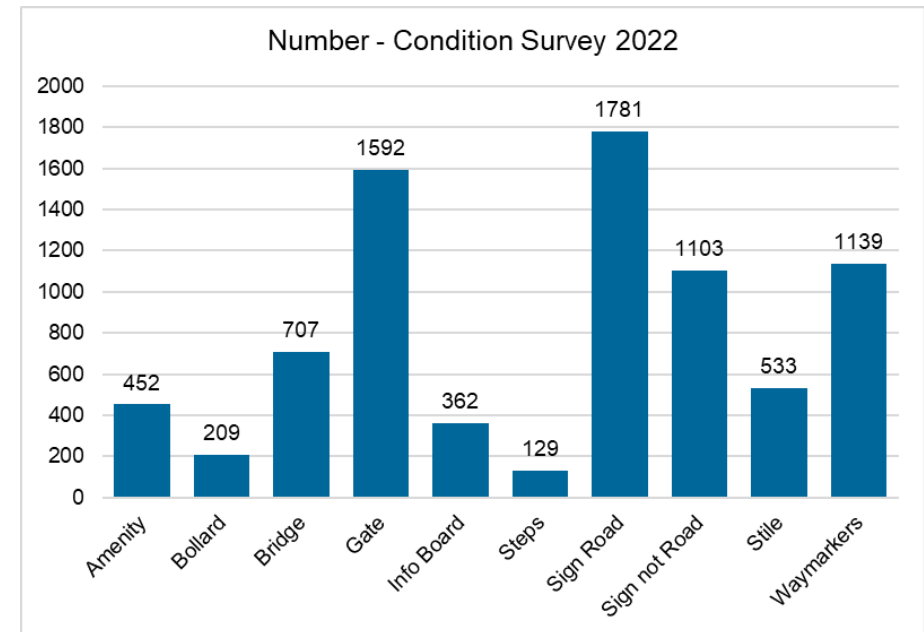
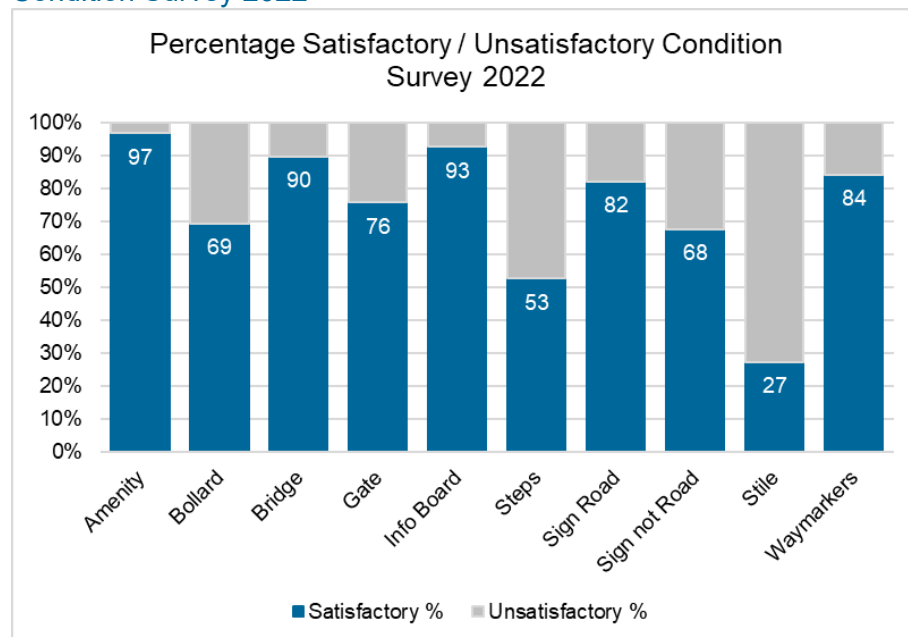


Table 5: Summary of Infrastructure and Condition - 2022 Survey

	Satisfactory	%	Unsatisfactory	%	Total
Amenity	437	97	15	3	452
Bollard	145	69	64	31	209
Bridge	633	90	74	10	707
Gate	1204	76	388	24	1592
Info Board	335	93	27	7	362
Steps	68	53	61	47	129
Sign Road	1463	82	318	18	1781
Sign not Road	746	68	357	32	1103
Stile	146	27	387	73	533
Waymarkers	959	84	180	16	1139

Chart 3: Furniture and Structures – Satisfactory / Unsatisfactory Condition Survey 2022



Overall, there has been a reduction of stiles on the public rights of way network between 2009 and 2022. The volunteer maintenance group has replaced at least 200 stiles with gates since the 2009 survey. This category of furniture had the lowest percentage in satisfactory condition and therefore is a priority for action.

Of the 197 bridleway gates, 53% were in satisfactory condition and a further 22% were satisfactory but inconvenient. Only 7% were unsatisfactory.

The 2022 condition survey showed that, of the public rights of way which these users were permitted to use, 68% of public right of way links were suitable for carriage drivers.

People with Reduced Mobility

The condition survey completed in 2022 has enabled further analysis to be carried out to determine where accessibility is reduced for those with reduced mobility.

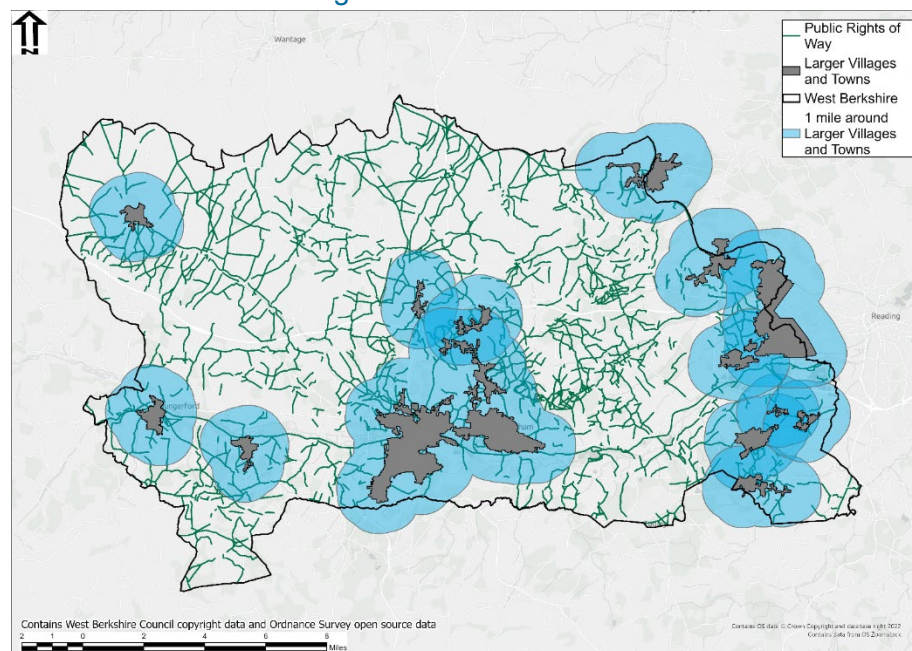
Further analysis was carried out for public rights of way in and within one mile of the main towns and larger villages.

The towns and villages included were:

- Lambourn
- Hungerford
- Kintbury
- Newbury, Thatcham and areas north of Newbury including Chieveley and Hermitage
- Streatley
- Pangbourne
- Reading outskirts and Theale
- Burghfield, Burghfield Common and Mortimer

This analysis provides detailed information on furniture or other issues which may reduce access for those with reduced mobility. It also shows the number of issues on each public right of way. This analysis will enable targeted improvements to be made in areas of higher demand close to where people live. The broader results of the condition survey also show issues across the wider network.

Plan 14: Areas of Further Analysis - Issues Reducing Accessibility Close to Towns and Villages

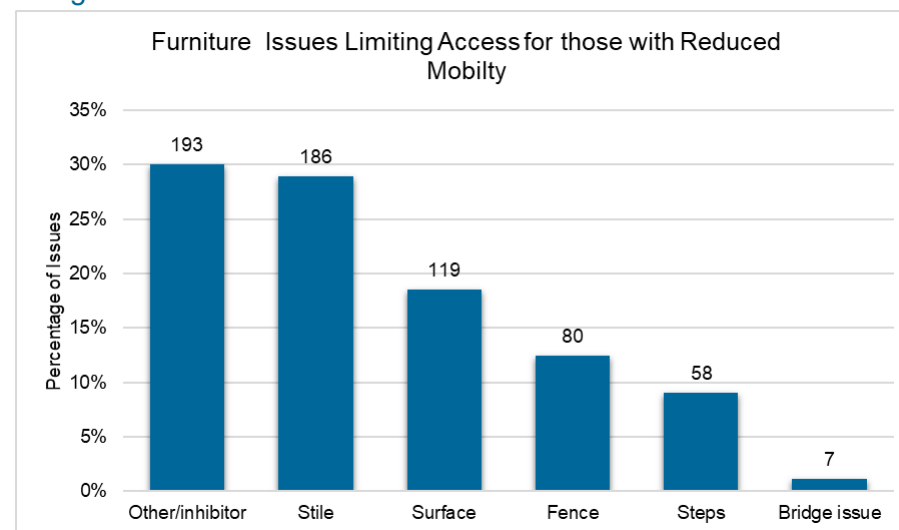


Most of the issues relating to public rights of way structures highlighted in the analysis were in satisfactory condition (55%). They are highlighted because they will cause difficulties for those with reduced mobility, not because the structure itself is in an unsatisfactory condition. Most of the issues should not present an access issue to more mobile users. There are supplementary reports and mapping which will enable improvements to be prioritised. The category 'other/inhibitor' covers a wide range of issues which

Chart 4: Issues Restricting Mobility in areas Close to Towns and Villages

Type of Issue	Number	%
Other/inhibitor	193	30%
Stile	186	29%
Surface	119	19%
Fence	80	12%
Steps	58	9%
Bridge issue	7	1%
Total	643	

Chart 5: Issues Restricting Mobility in areas Close to Towns and Villages



Supporting the Communities of West Berkshire

Demographic Profile

Population

According to the Office of National Statistics mid-year estimates 2020, West Berkshire has a resident population of approximately 158,465.

21% are aged 16 and under, 61% are of working age (16-64), and 20% are aged 65 and over. This age profile is roughly in line with the South East and England.

Most people (64% - around 101,111) live in settlements along the Kennet Valley, and in the suburban areas just to the west of Reading borough. The largest urban areas in the district are Newbury and Thatcham, where around 69,667 (44%) of West Berkshire residents live. A fifth of residents (20% - 31,444) residents live in the suburban area adjoining Reading borough. The remaining 36% (around 57,354) of people live in rural settlements. West Berkshire has one of the most dispersed populations in the South East with 225 people per hectare.

Ethnicity

The latest ethnicity statistics are from the Census 2011. At this time, 94.8% of West Berkshire residents were recorded as of White ethnicity, higher than both the South East and England, see Table 6. Asian / Asian British is the second largest ethnic group in West

Berkshire, but in most areas the percentage is less than the South East average. The exceptions are central Newbury and Tilehurst on the outskirts of Reading, which itself has a higher than the South East population average of Asian / Asian British people, see Plan 15.

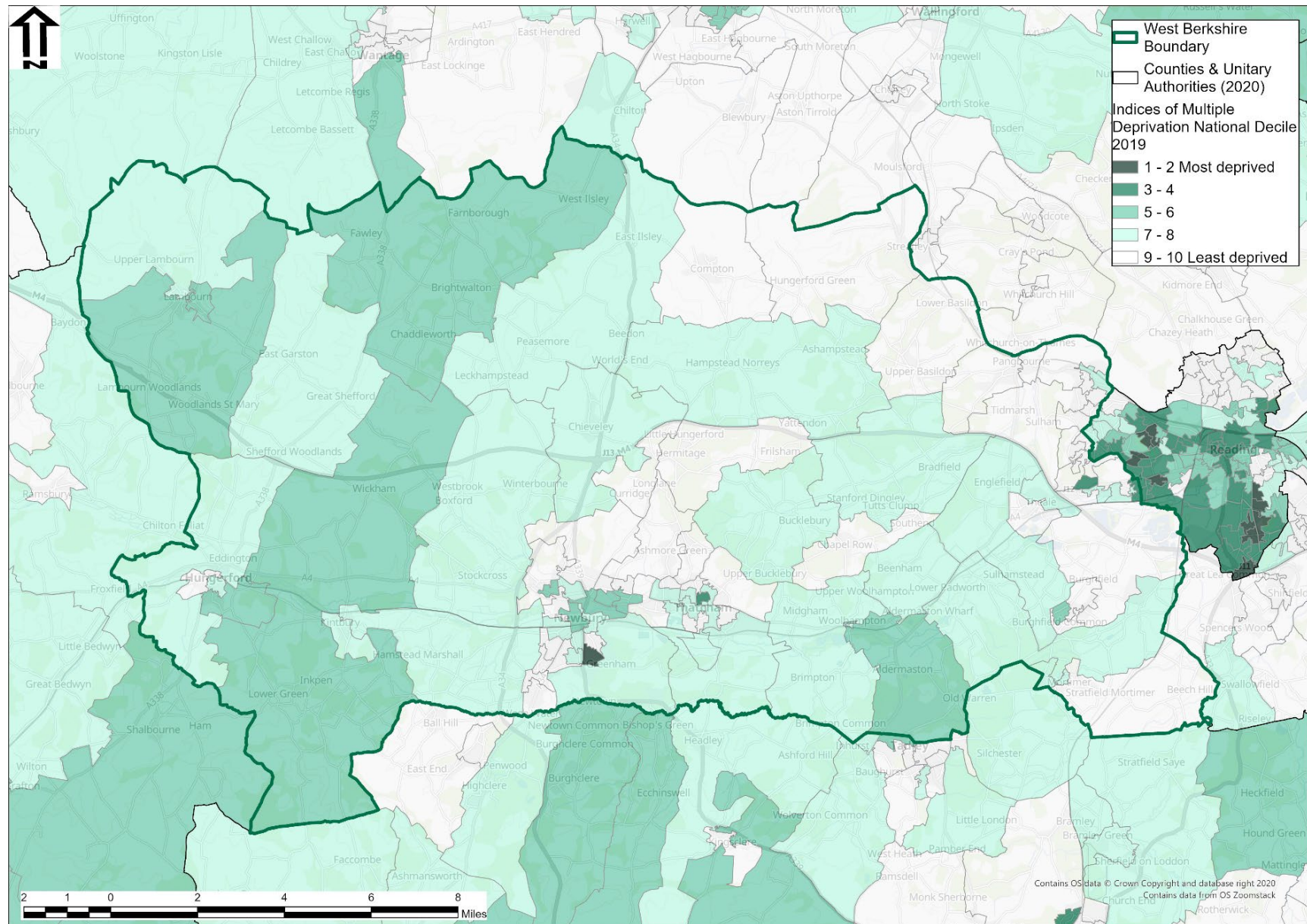
Table 6: Ethnicity - Census 2011

Name	West Berkshire		South East		England	
Ethnic Group	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Asian / Asian British	3,808	2.5	452,042	5.2	4,143,403	7.8
Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	1,376	0.9	136,013	1.6	1,846,614	3.5
Mixed / multiple ethnic groups	2,420	1.6	167,764	1.9	1,192,879	2.3
Other ethnic group	364	0.2	51,111	0.6	548,418	1
White	145,854	94.8	7,827,820	90.7	45,281,142	85.4

Deprivation

Overall, West Berkshire has low levels of deprivation. The 2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation ranks West Berkshire as the 28th least deprived local authority in England, out of 317 local authorities and the 6th least deprived county, out of 151 counties / upper tier local authorities. Deprivation is shown in Plan 16. Most of West Berkshire is not deprived, although there are some small pockets of higher deprivation in Newbury, Theale, Thatcham and the outskirts of Reading.

Plan 16: Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019 – Overall



Socio-Economic Classification

National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) (Census 2011) has been constructed to measure the employment relations and conditions of occupations to show the structure of socio-economic positions and to help to explain variations in social behaviour and other social phenomena.

The NS-SEC has eight analytic classes:

- 1 Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations
 - 2 Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations
 - 3 Intermediate occupations
 - 4 Small employers and own account workers
 - 5 Lower supervisory and technical occupations
 - 6 Semi-routine occupations
 - 7 Routine occupations
 - 8 Never worked and long-term unemployed
-

The average percentage of the population within classes 1 and 2 (higher and lower managerial) in the South East is 36%. In most areas of West Berkshire the percentage of people in this class is at or higher than the South East average, see Plan 17. The number of people who have never worked or are long-term unemployed is less than the South East average for most areas of West Berkshire.

Health and Wellbeing Needs

Health and Access to the Natural Environment

Poor health, as well as being detrimental to the individuals themselves, incurs a cost to society; through the direct costs of health care provision and reduced economic output from lower employee productivity, higher absence rates and early mortality.

Being physically active is strongly linked to better health and wellbeing. There is an established causal link between physical activity and at least 20 different chronic health conditions, including coronary heart disease, stroke, cancer, type 2 diabetes and mental health problems.⁴³ The natural environment supports increased physical activity, with level of activity influenced by:

- Distance to a green space;
- Ease of access;
- Size of the green space in terms of levels of population use;
- Connectivity to residential and commercial areas;
- Attractiveness, including biodiverse habitats and absence of graffiti and litter;
- Range of amenity - the wider the range of facilities the more likely the space is to be used by different kinds of people.⁴⁴

The Marmot Review⁴⁵ highlighted that the fair distribution of health, wellbeing and sustainability is influenced by a wide range of factors. These include community resilience, the built environment and the local economy as well as the wider environment. Sustainable places and communities are one of the Marmot Review's policy objectives, recognising the importance of good quality open and greenspace in tackling health inequality. However, availability and quality of access

to greenspace is not evenly distributed, with those in deprived urban areas often having less access to health-supporting greenspace.⁴⁶

Health and wellbeing has historically been poorly integrated with spatial planning leading to the creation of places which do not support people in regular activity or which contribute to poor health through high levels of road pollution.⁴⁷

Physical activity in the natural environment also has a greater impact on improved mental health than physical activity alone.⁴⁸

Improvements in self-esteem,⁴⁹ positive and negative mood, anxiety levels and feelings of calmness and comfort, with exercise in all types of green environment showing these benefits.⁵⁰ Often the activity takes place with family, friends or in a group, increasing the mental health benefits gained through social interaction.

The rights of way network can have a significant role in delivering this and improving health and wellbeing for example through:

- Providing access resources in areas of high health inequality – particularly where other green space provision is lacking;
- Increasing sustainable and 'active travel' through providing safe walking and cycling routes for short journeys and, through this, improving health and reducing pollution;
- Enabling access beyond the urban areas (where there are generally the highest levels of health deprivation) to natural habitats and attractive landscapes;
- Providing the asset for community-based activities, such as walking for health, thereby not only improving health, but also fostering social cohesion;
- Providing free-at-the-point-of-use resource facilities for exercise, removing barriers for economically disadvantaged communities.

COVID-19 Pandemic

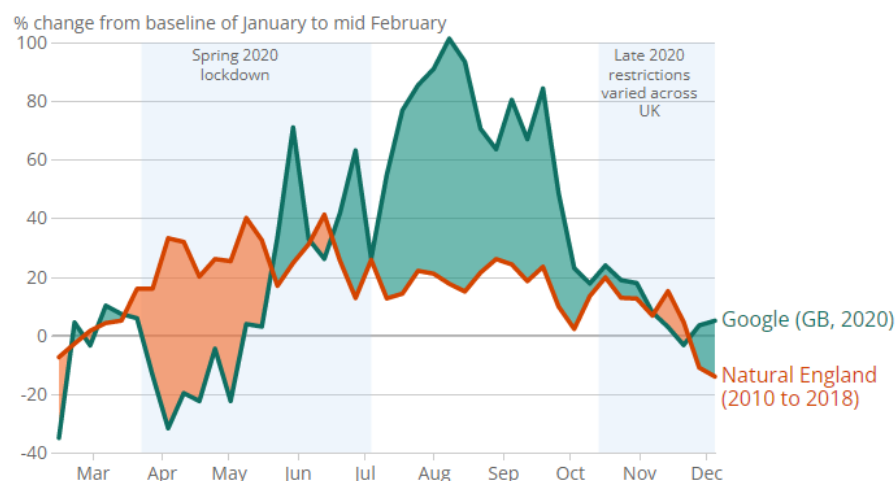
The COVID-19 pandemic, beginning around February 2020, and the associated restrictions placed on society, resulted in many more people visiting greenspaces and the outdoors, see below.⁵¹

Figure 1: Use of Parks During 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic

Use of parks and public green spaces were up on previous years during summer 2020

Change in mobility to parks and public green spaces compared with a baseline period (3 January to 6 February 2020), Google mobility (UK, 2020) compared with Natural England (England, 2009 to 2018)

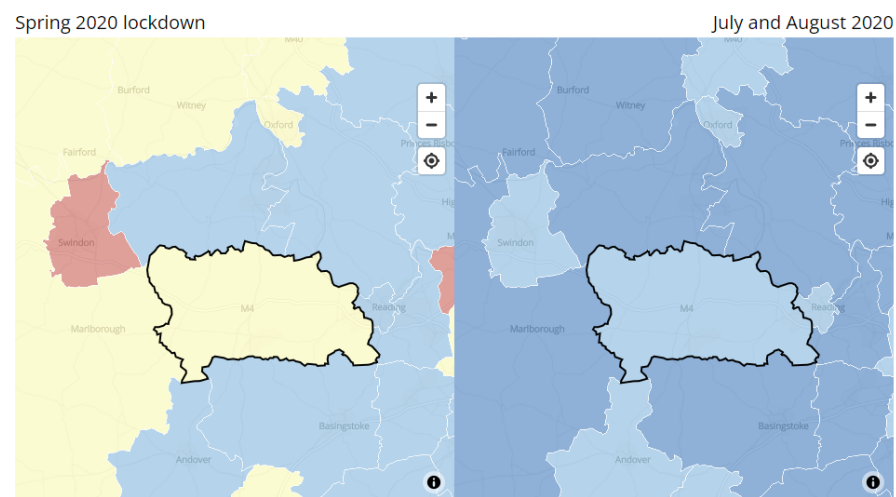
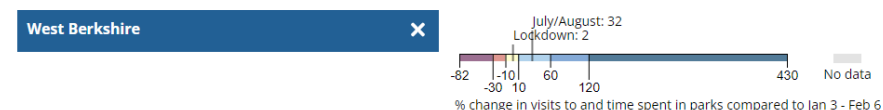
More or **less** visits to and time spent in parks **in 2020** compared with **a normal year**.



During the spring lockdown in 2020 the Office for National Statistics reported that there was a small decrease (2%) in time spent in West Berkshire's parks compared to January to February 2020 (see right). However, when lockdown restrictions eased in July and August 2020,

there was an increase of 32%. This was slightly less than in neighbouring authority areas, but generally in line with the wider trend in the area.

Figure 2: Visiting Open Spaces (West Berkshire) During 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic



During the lockdowns, isolation, along with other factors, contributed to a decline in mental health. However, there is evidence that the natural environment has helped some people to cope with negative feelings such as increased anxiety. Around 9 in 10 people surveyed by Natural England in May 2020 agreed that natural spaces are good for mental health and wellbeing. More than 40% noticed that nature, wildlife, and visiting local green and natural spaces had been more important to their wellbeing since the coronavirus restrictions began.

Green and outdoor spaces also appear to have played an important role in becoming a space which allowed people to see their loved ones during periods of isolation.

However, not everyone had equal access to the greenspace and there is a clear connection between how people have been using the outdoors under coronavirus restrictions and the distance between their home and greenspaces. In lockdown, those living closer to their nearest public greenspace were more likely to visit than those living further away. High-income households increased the time they spent keeping fit during lockdown, while low-income households did not.

Some of the interest in nature recorded in spring and summer 2020 waned during winter 2020 / 2021, although this might be due to colder weather. It is possible that those most likely to maintain increased exercise and visits to greenspaces are those whose circumstances most allow them to, such as those whose workplaces decide to offer homeworking permanently.

The pandemic has underlined the importance of outdoor space for physical exercise and mental health. It has also highlighted that existing inequalities in provision and differences in levels of visiting greenspace in different socio-economic groups persisted through the pandemic. Those groups less likely to visit greenspaces (lower income groups), or those who lived further away, continued to visit these spaces less than other more advantaged groups.

Results from the consultation exercise carried out to gather evidence for this Rights of Way Improvement Plan⁵² showed that use of public rights of way increased and that access to the countryside and greenspace was important for many people during this time.

The research showed that increased during this time and indicated that the level of use is likely to remain higher than prior to the pandemic. An extremely high proportion of the public (98%) and all of the local councils said that public rights of way had been important during the pandemic and associated lockdowns. A majority of the public (60%) reported that they had used public rights of way more. This was echoed in other surveys, with 96% of councils and 80% of landowners reporting that the number of people using public rights of way had increased during the pandemic. Nearly all (96%) of the public who had increased use of public rights of way during the pandemic indicated they intended to continue to use public rights of way more often than prior to the pandemic.

West Berkshire's Health Indicators

The health of West Berkshire is in many cases better than the England average. Overall indicators of life expectancy are higher than both the South East and England average for both males and females and the mortality rates are lower. The percentage of physically active adults is higher and the number of overweight or obese adults is lower, see Table 7.

Table 7: Health Indicators⁵³

Health Indicator	West Berkshire	South East	England
Life expectancy at birth (male) (2018/20)	81.4 years	80.6 years	79.4 years
Life expectancy at birth (female) (2018/20)	85.2 years	84.1 years	83.1 years
Under 75 mortality rate from all causes (2017/19) per 100,000	264.2	293.9	336.5
Under 75 mortality rate from All cardiovascular diseases per 100,000	47.1	57.1	70.4
Percentage of physically active adults (2019/20)	77.3%	69.5%	66.4%
Percentage of adults (aged 18+) classified as overweight or obese	60.0%	61.5%	62.8%

West Berkshire's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) sets out findings and actions for a range of health needs:

- Obesity⁵⁴ - measures listed in the JSNA include supporting people in becoming more active, for example providing information about parks and green spaces, supporting Health Walks and increasing walking and cycling. These actions are also pertinent to supporting a reduction in the prevalence of type 2 diabetes.⁵⁵
- Mental health^{56,57} – some groups are at higher risk, including minority ethnic groups, drug and alcohol service users, offenders, migrants, after childbirth and in older age. The JSNA sets out that people with mental health conditions should be supported to lead healthier lifestyles that improve their physical health, including increasing physical activity and losing weight. In older adults depression is the most common mental health issue. The prevalence of dementia increases with age. Social isolation and poverty can also increase the prevalence of mental health issues in older age. The JSNA recommends actions to encourage and support older people to take advantage of and participate in meaningful activity, social activity and physical activity and to ensure health promotion programmes include older people.

In line with overall deprivation in West Berkshire, there are few areas with high levels of health and disability deprivation. However, there are pockets in Newbury, Thatcham and Theale and on the outskirts of Reading.

Activity Levels in West Berkshire

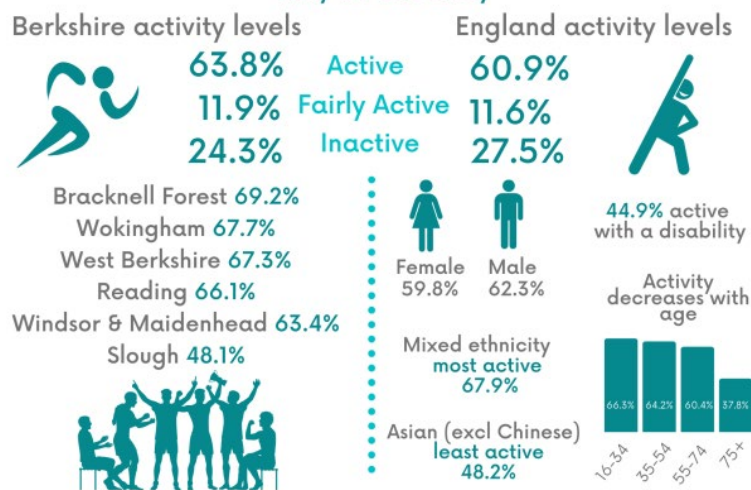
Sport England's Active Lives Survey measures the sport and physical activity levels of adults (aged 16+) across England.⁵⁸ In this survey, West Berkshire recorded levels of activity higher than both England and Berkshire as a whole. In this context 'active' people do physical activity for at least 150 minutes each week; 'fairly active' people for 30-149 minutes and 'inactive' people less than 30 minutes each week.

Activity levels in West Berkshire had been increasing between 2018/19 to 2019/20 with a 9.3% increase in activity levels.⁵⁹ However, the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the amount and types of physical activities which people participated in..

Figure 3 (below) shows activity levels, with this survey carried out during the pandemic and associated restrictions.

Figure 3: Activity Levels - Berkshire⁶⁰

Sport England Active Lives results October 2021 May 20-21 survey



West Berkshire's Leisure Strategy

West Berkshire Council's Leisure Strategy 2022 focusses on 'active leisure' where the activity involves physical effort that will deliver health and wellbeing benefits to the individual.⁶¹

The vision of the strategy is that *'By 2032 we will have an increased participation in active leisure for all, with a particular focus on those least active, through access to a network of modern and sustainable indoor facilities together with a diverse mix of accessible public outdoor sports facilities and greenspace and bluespace.'*

Public rights of way are included within the Leisure Strategy and are specifically mentioned in Aim 4 of the strategy, and also contribute to Aims 1 and 5:

Aims of Leisure Strategy 2022 – Relevant to Public Rights of Way

1. Increase participation for all, with an emphasis on those less physically active, and maintain improved activity levels throughout lives;
4. Measurably enhance access to, and utilisation of greenspace and bluespace, through improving accessibility to open water, waterways, parks, commons and Public Rights of Way;
5. Further develop partnerships (with town and parish councils, sport governing bodies, health organisations and the voluntary sector), with an emphasis on actively encouraging volunteering.

The objectives for these aims are repeated here as they are very relevant to this ROWIP.

AIM 1. Increase participation for all, with an emphasis on those less physically active, and maintain improved activity levels throughout lives:

- 1.1. Significantly increase the provision of activities targeted at the less physically active, with a strong emphasis on activities for 'people like me';
- 1.2. Increase the provision of targeted activities for individuals with challenges resulting from health issues or disabilities, through active collaboration with health and voluntary sector partners;
- 1.3. Work across the Council to improve use and accessibility of leisure activities, facilities and greenspace;
- 1.4. Develop low/no cost activity options for low-income individuals and families;
- 1.5. Ensure the provision of leisure opportunities responds creatively to evolving demand;
- 1.6. Create a communication strategy to raise awareness of the benefits and local availability of physical activity opportunities.

AIM 4. Measurably enhance access to, and utilisation of greenspace and bluespace, through improving accessibility and awareness of open water, waterways, parks, commons and Public Rights of Way:

- 4.1. Explore new and additional leisure activity options where there is a clear demand;
- 4.2. Work with partners and residents to develop and deliver a programme of work to make our parks 'safe spaces' for all users;
- 4.3. Invest in improving accessibility to greenspace through provision of safe routes and facilities for disabled access;

4.4. Improve the provision of facilities for young people in parks and open spaces, considering both physical and social needs;

4.5. Ensure the recommendations of the Environment Strategy and the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, related to activity, are supported and adopted.

AIM 5. Further develop partnerships (with town and parish councils, sport governing bodies, health organisations and the voluntary sector), with an emphasis on actively encouraging volunteering:

5.1. Engage with partners across the voluntary and private sector to improve the level of co-ordinated services delivery;

5.2. Engage with health organisations to enhance accessibility to services via social and health prescribing opportunities;

5.3. Co-create a 'volunteering network strategy' with voluntary and community groups to increase the level of volunteering in support of physical activity;

5.4. Invest in provision of advice and support for voluntary groups, with a focus on access to funding;

5.5. Develop a focussed programme to engage with target groups, particularly children and young people, to co-create plans that address their leisure aspirations and needs;

5.6. Work with partners to reduce their cost and access issues for Council facilities.

West Berkshire Walking for Health

There is an active programme of health walks in West Berkshire, called Wellbeing Walks.⁶²

There are free, regular, led Wellbeing Walks for people of all abilities in many locations across West Berkshire. The walks provide an opportunity to explore the outdoors, discover new places and meet new people. Trained volunteers lead the walks to provide encouragement and support to pedestrians of all abilities.

Join a walk today

just turn up and join in!

West Berkshire

Walking for Health

WELLBEING
WALKS

West Berkshire

Monday		
10 - 11am	Hungerford Common – (Hungerford Rugby Club car park)	👤👤
11am - 12pm	Stroud Green, Newbury (Opp. The Plough Pub)	👤👤
(1st & 3rd of month) 10.30 - 11.15am	Beansheaf Community Centre Calcot	👤👤
(4th of month) 10:30am - 12pm	Englefield Estate Walk (Recreation Ground, Englefield Road, Theale)	👤👤👤

Tuesday		
10 - 11.30am	Mortimer (The Community Centre Car Park, The Street)	👤👤👤
10:30 - 11.30am	Mortimer (The Community Centre Car Park, The Street, Mortimer)	👤👤
(1st, 3rd, 4th & 5th) 10 - 11am	Kintbury (Coronation Hall, Kintbury)	👤👤
(2nd of the month) 10 - 11am	Inkpen (Crown and Garter Inn)	👤👤
11am - 12pm	Northcroft Leisure Centre, Newbury (car park)	👤👤
10:30 - 11am	Burdwood Surgery, Thatcham (Car Park)	👤

Wednesday		
10 - 11am	Hosehill Lake, Theale (Fox & Hounds car park)	👤👤

Friday		
(1st of month) 10 - 11.30am	Greenham Common (Control Tower car park)	👤👤
(2nd of month) 10 - 11am	Nature Discovery Centre, Muddy Lane, Lower Way, Thatcham	👤👤👤
(3rd of month) 10 - 11am	Snelmore Common, Newbury (Rangers Office)	👤👤👤
(4th of month) 10 - 11am	Northcroft Leisure Centre, Newbury (car park)	👤👤👤
(5th of month) 10 - 11am	Nature Discovery Centre, Muddy Lane, Lower Way,	👤👤👤

👤 Suitable for beginners
Everybody welcome to walk at their own pace.
No stiles options available

👤👤 Brisk walks, for regular walkers

For further information on Wellbeing Walks in West Berkshire please contact Public Health on 01635 503437 walking@westberks.gov.uk or visit info.westberks.gov.uk/wellbeingwalks or www.facebook.com/wbcpublichealth

West Berkshire
COUNCIL

WBC/PHP/G022

West Berkshire – Wider Context

The Environment and Climate Change

Biodiversity

West Berkshire has a diverse natural environment and many areas which are important for nature. There are many protected sites and several Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), protected as nationally important. Large sections of the River Kennet and River Lambourne are SSSIs and some of these are also Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) which mean they are internationally important. There are also some public rights of way which are within or near these designated sites. It is important that surfacing of paths within these areas is carefully considered, especially in the floodplain, as runoff can affect the SAC.

Biodiversity Opportunity Areas, which are the priority areas for restoring a network of habitats, cover large areas of West Berkshire. These cover most of the eastern side of the district and much of the Kennet Valley and the Lambourne Valley. At the time of this report Berkshire Local Nature Partnership is developing a Local Nature Recovery Network which may update these priority areas.

The Berkshire Biodiversity Strategy recognises the importance of access to nature for physical and mental wellbeing. The strategy has the following objectives for people - to promote the utilisation of

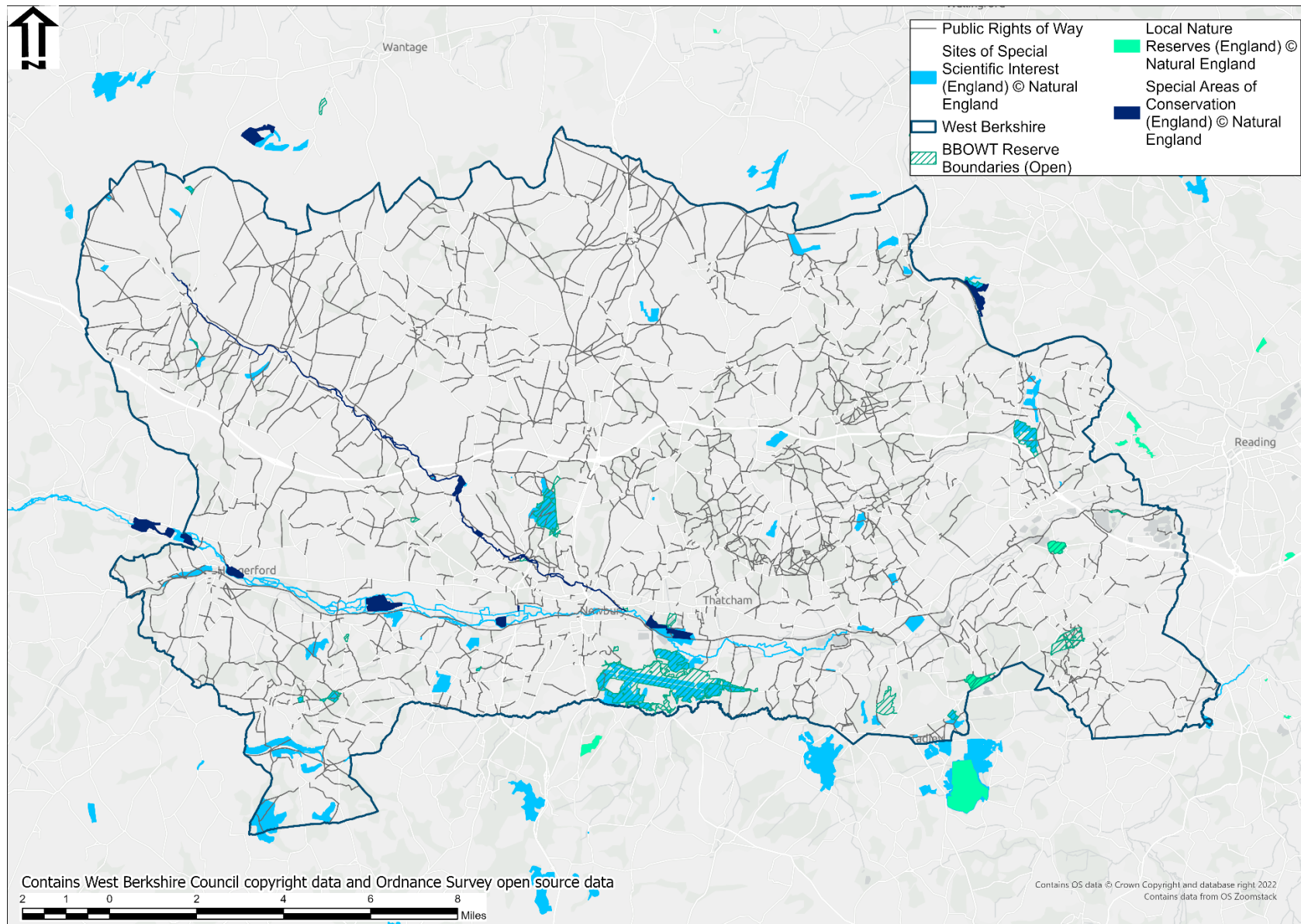
outdoor space for physical activity and to raise awareness of the natural environment and the services it provides us.

Sometimes high levels of access can be in conflict with nature conservation aims. High number of people cause damage to some habitats and species, for example through disturbance of birds and other species, trampling of habitats and flora, litter or antisocial behaviour.

In West Berkshire many of the designated nature conservation sites are located in areas of high population and recreation demand. Snelsmore Country Park and Greenham and Crookham Commons are both very popular sites and are also SSSIs. Management of these sites takes into account their nature conservation interest, but increasing populations in close proximity to these sites could increase the number of people visiting and pressure on habitats and species. The public rights of way network can help to spread the impact of recreation demand through providing other areas for access and to encourage people to use areas away from the 'honey pot' sites. Improving accessibility and promotion can help to disperse visitor pressure.

Some public rights of way also cross sites which are important for nature conservation. This may have an impact on management decisions, which may include consideration of the timing or extent of vegetation cutting or choice of path surfaces.

Plan 19: Biodiversity Sites and Public Rights of Way



Climate Change

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges being faced by society. The impacts of climate change are already evident and will become more severe and widespread as temperatures rise.

West Berkshire Council declared a Climate Emergency on 2nd July 2019 and is committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2030. The council's Environment Strategy (2020 - 2030) sets out a vision for West Berkshire's environment. It is linked to the need for a strong local economy supported by responsible growth, and for the local population to be healthy and have a positive sense of wellbeing. Central to the vision is the expectation that all of the district's residents and businesses will contribute towards the aspiration of becoming a carbon neutral district by 2030.

The Strategic Priorities from the Environment Strategy are:

- Carbon Neutral by 2030 - The council itself aims to be carbon neutral in its own operations by 2030;
- Responsible Economic Growth - decoupling economic growth from climate change emissions and influencing business towards carbon neutrality;
- Healthy Communities - highlights the link between active lifestyles, good air quality and access to green and blue spaces and encouraging active travel;
- Resilient to Climate Change - Adaptation to climate change impacts, for example flood management and reducing vulnerabilities;
- Working with our Communities and Partners - working with communities to raise awareness and support everyone to work towards climate neutrality.

Environment newsletters are sent out to residents on the mailing list every month.

The public rights of way service, alongside other West Berkshire Council services, has a role to play in reducing carbon emissions. This will be both through its operational activities, for example in travel of staff, selection and working practices of contractors and materials. The service can also support active travel and encourage people to use public rights of way which are local to them, rather than travelling across the district to sites or public rights of way using private cars.

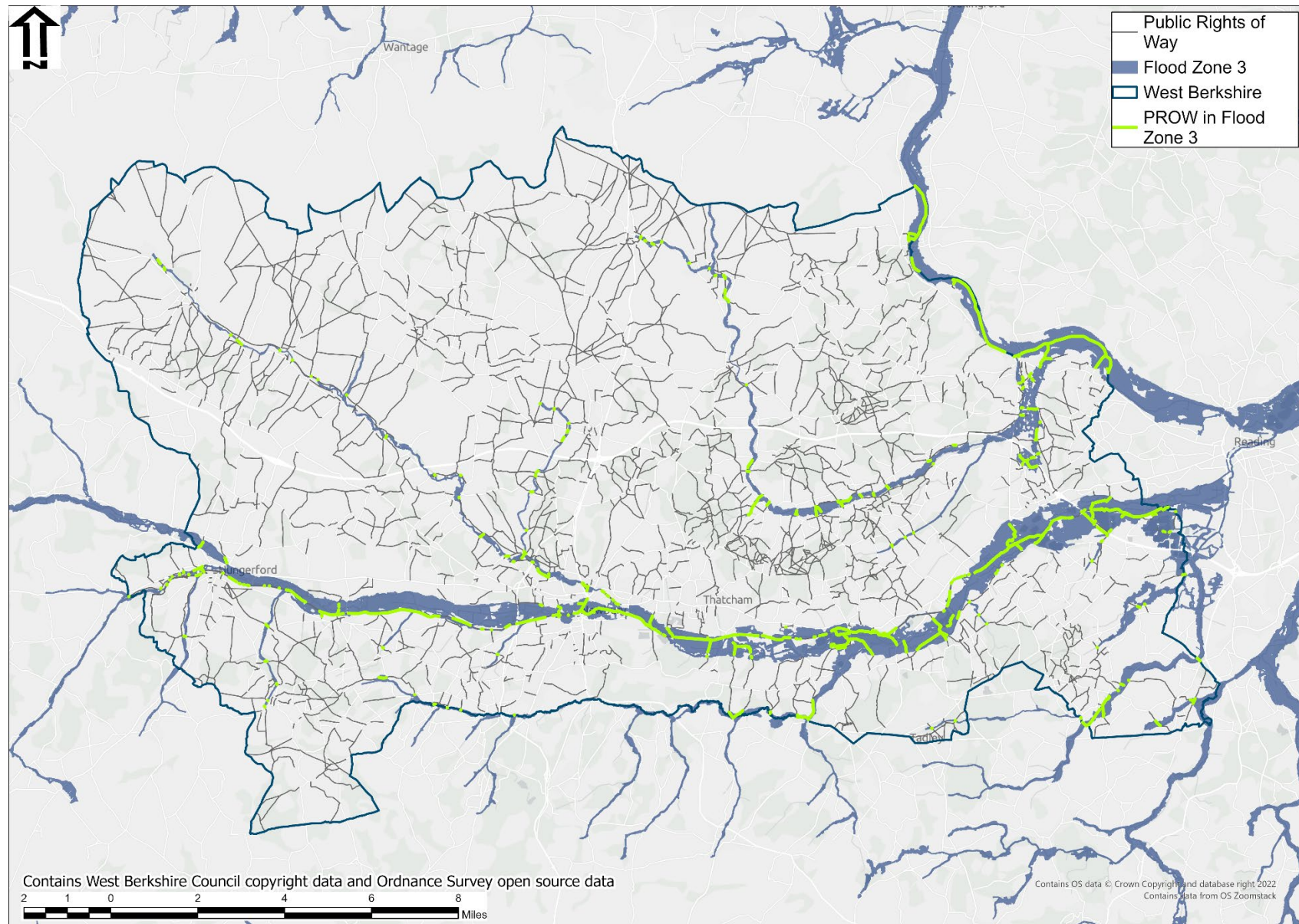
Climate Change Adaptation

Predictions suggest that in South East England there will be hotter and drier summers with more heatwaves and drought. There are also likely to be warmer and wetter winters with heavier rainfall and more flooding.

Flooding in particular could have an impact on public rights of way. This may damage surfaces and structures, including bridges. This increased likelihood of flooding will need to be considered in the design of paths.

The sections of path in Flood Zone 3 is shown in Plan 20. Large sections of the paths alongside the main rivers, including the Kennet and Thames, are within the flood zone. In addition, localised areas will be at risk of more localised flooding from surface water.

Plan 20: Public Rights of Way in Flood Zone 3



West Berkshire's Economy and Growth

West Berkshire's Economy

West Berkshire has a strong economy, with low levels of unemployment and a diverse range of businesses across many industries.

The West Berkshire 2036 Strategy and the West Berkshire Economic Development Strategy 2020 (refresh June 2021) both highlight that the countryside and the diverse nature and landscapes are noted as economic strengths for the district. West Berkshire branding for businesses promotes West Berkshire as a place that offers the best of both worlds – an outstanding natural environment alongside good access to Reading and London.

Public rights of way help to underpin the vibrant economy of West Berkshire, contributing to the unique factors which make the area an attractive place to live, work and do business. The areas in which public rights of way can support the priorities of West Berkshire Economic Development Strategy include:

- Supporting rural businesses – attracting visitors and spend to rural areas;
- Enhance the leisure offering – public rights of way make a significant contribution to the range of facilities for leisure;
- Support delivery of the Environment Strategy's green infrastructure targets – public rights of way are an important green infrastructure asset;
- Enhance sustainable transport infrastructure – promoting and supporting active travel

During the COVID-19 pandemic the number of people working from home increased. Whilst many have returned to the office, hybrid working from home and office has become more normal, giving more people more time in their working day to be more active and use public rights of way.

Visitor Economy

Public rights of way can also support the visitor economy. It is part of the overall visitor economy 'offer' and could be more fully utilised to support the visitor economy, including rural businesses.

The two National Trails – The Ridgeway National Trail and The Thames Path National Trail – attract visitors in their own right, but public rights of way have the potential to play a more important role in supporting the visitor economy, across the whole of West Berkshire.

Day visitors and longer overnight trips can be attracted by the countryside, landscape and the range of attractions that West Berkshire has to offer. There are many high quality tourism attractions in West Berkshire, including historic sites, buildings and country houses, attractive cultural landscapes and nature, market towns and attractive villages. Public rights of way often link to these sites and offer further opportunities to explore the surroundings. They also make West Berkshire an attractive place for a range of recreational activities – including off-road cycling, walking and equestrian activities.

Newbury Business Improvement District (Newbury BID) hosts the Visit Newbury website,⁶³ promoting attractions for visitors. The site includes some information on walking and cycling.

The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan⁶⁴ also recognises the importance of leisure and tourism. The strategy includes a strategic objective to ‘*Support well-managed and sustainable tourism and recreation businesses to promote the North Wessex Downs as a destination for responsible tourism that respects and promotes the special qualities of the AONB and its setting.*’ In this, it includes policies to provide promoted routes, routes to help recreational users avoid busy roads, promoting the responsible use of public rights of way and protecting sensitive historical and nature sites.

The North Wessex Downs AONB has also held a Walking Festival, with some of the events held in West Berkshire.⁶⁵

Development Planning

The West Berkshire adopted Local Plan is a long-term strategic document used by West Berkshire Council to set out its vision and a framework for the future development of the area. It is made up of several documents which together form planning policy for the district.⁶⁶ The strategic housing sites are located in south and east Newbury, with smaller sites elsewhere in the district.

Public rights of way are included in the green infrastructure policy of the Core Strategy (CS18). This set out the need to protect and enhance green infrastructure, address deficiencies and protect against loss.

At the time of this report a review of the Local Plan is being carried out and a new Local Plan is likely to be adopted within the period of this ROWIP. The emerging Local Plan includes proposals for 9,000 new homes in West Berkshire through to 2039. Until the new Local Plan is

adopted, the current plan remains the planning policy which can be applied. The proposed locations of strategic housing allocations are in southern Newbury and north east of Thatcham, with smaller development throughout the district. The Local Plan is likely to be subject to amendment during the process of its development of adoption.

The emerging Local Plan includes a proposed revision to the green infrastructure policy which more explicitly includes access networks and public rights of way. Policy SP10 states that development proposals will be required to take account of existing access networks within and around the site. Opportunities should be sought to protect and enhance the public rights of way network within and adjacent to development proposals in line with the National Planning Policy Framework, having particular regard to ensuring the needs of all users have been provided throughout the year. The addition of new connections and status upgrades to the existing rights of way network will be supported. In addition, proposals for major development will be required to consider the long-term management and maintenance and for some, a Public Rights of Way Strategy will be required.

The Minerals and Waste Local Plan (2022) also contains a policy on public rights of way.

There are also several Village, Town and Parish Design Statements (VDS). Several of these recognise the importance of public rights of way to their area, especially those covering rural settlements and parishes. Those in bold form supplementary planning guidance:

- **Basildon VDS (March 2001)**
- Bucklebury Vision Parish Design Statement (Oct 2019)
- **Chieveley VDS (April 2002)**

- **Cold Ash and Ashmore Green VDS (May 2002)**
- **Speen Village Design Statement (VDS)**
- **Beenham VDS (July 2003)**
- **Hermitage VDS (July 2004)**
- **Inkpen VDS (August 2004)**
- Newbury TDS (refresh July 2018)
- Compton VDS (October 2005)
- Pangbourne VDS (November 2005)
- Brimpton VDS (2007)
- Stratfield Mortimer VDS (November 2007)
- Streatley VDS (March 2009)
- Hamstead Marshall VDS (August 2009)
- Stanford Dingley VDS (January 2010)
- Burghfield VDS (August 2011)

Transport and Active Travel

There is a high level of car ownership in West Berkshire and use of the private car is predicted to increase. Peak time congestion occurs at some junctions and other hotspots, such as the M4, although there is not a more widespread problem. There are also some areas of poorer air quality due to road traffic and there is an Air Quality Management Area around the A339/A343/Greenham Common roundabout.⁶⁷

Active travel, i.e. walking and cycling for journeys, allows people to be physically active as part of their daily lives and brings a range of benefits including reducing congestion and air pollution.

Air pollution caused by road traffic has a detrimental effect on health, increasing both mortality and morbidity. Increased walking and cycling

for journeys reduces local levels of air pollution and helps to improve health. Walking is the easiest, most accessible, cost effective, and enjoyable way for most people to increase their physical activity.

A well-designed, accessible environment can encourage people to walk or cycle. People cycle more when there is cycle infrastructure and separation from traffic. Conversely, a lack of routes, poor availability of information about routes, concerns over safety and the speed and convenience of motorised transport can all act as barriers to people choosing active travel.⁶⁸ There may also be personal barriers, such as time constraints, confidence or safety fears.

The UK All Party Commission on Physical Activity recommends measures to design physical activity back into our everyday lives, stressing the importance of active travel as regular daily transport and planning development and infrastructure to ensure prioritisation of walking, cycling and physical exercise.

Active Travel can not only help to reduce congestion, in urban areas it may also provide a quicker journey than by motor vehicle. Investment in active travel also makes economic sense, with a high benefit to cost ratio for many schemes.

West Berkshire's Active Travel Strategy 2011-2026 forms part of the suite of documents making up the Local Transport Plan (LTP). The strategy includes walking, cycling and equestrian activities. The Active Travel Strategy is due to be reviewed in 2023-24.

Footway and public rights of way improvements are included in the LTP. The strategy stresses the importance of inclusion of pedestrian facilities and proximity to facilities when planning new development.

For cycling, the strategy notes that due to the unique mix of areas in West Berkshire a 'one size fits all' approach for improving cycling is not appropriate. Priorities for each area need to be different and improvements can take many forms including infrastructure, information provision or signage. In urban areas improvements are needed to provide links to work, education and retail. In rural areas links will be mainly for leisure purposes, with some localised improvements within villages to facilitate access to local services.

The strategy sets out that where cycle tracks are provided they should be made available for equestrian users as well. Other actions for equestrians include improvement of public rights of way, road signage warning of equestrians, provision of box parking and promotional materials.

The targets and policies relating to active travel are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: LTP Policies and Active Travel Strategy Targets - Walking, Cycling and Equestrian Activities

LTP Policy	Targets in Active Travel Strategy
Walking	Walking Targets
The Council will work towards increasing the use of walking as a mode of travel for local journeys and as a means of accessing other sustainable travel modes for longer journeys. To achieve this, the Council will focus on the following:	<p>AT1.1 To increase walking to school from 48% (2010) to 55% by 2016.</p> <p>AT1.2 Complete 5 projects per year that increase the length and /</p>

LTP Policy	Targets in Active Travel Strategy
<p>i. Maintaining and, where possible, improving the condition of footways and pedestrian crossings.</p> <p>ii. Facilitating safe and prioritised pedestrian access to key destinations</p> <p>iii. Delivering the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and improving the links between public rights of way and local networks of footways</p> <p>iv. Promoting the benefits of walking for health and wellbeing.</p>	<p>or quality of the ROW network / footways</p> <p>AT1.3 Provisional: To increase the percentage of people walking to work on an annual basis up to 2016 through workplace travel plans</p>
Cycling	Cycling Targets
<p>The Council, in partnership with West Berkshire Cycle Forum, will work towards increasing cycling in West Berkshire. To achieve this, the Council will focus on the following:</p> <p>i. Establishing, improving and promoting a network of routes (strategic, local and recreational) for cycling.</p> <p>ii. Ensuring that all new developments make cycling at least as desirable as any other transport mode choice by connecting with the local network where possible and following the West Berkshire Council Cycling Guidance.</p> <p>iii. Ensuring that Children, Young People and Adults are equipped with</p>	<p>1 Cycle Training</p> <p>2 Cycle Parking (particularly at Railway Stations and Local Centres)</p> <p>3 Route extension and Improvement</p> <p>4 Travel Plans</p> <p>5 Publicity and Marketing</p> <p>6 Other... (WBC Cycling officer, Reduced speed limits, provision of off-road cycle corridors)</p>

LTP Policy	Targets in Active Travel Strategy
the knowledge, skills and training to cycle more often. iv. Promoting the benefits of cycling for health and wellbeing.	
Equestrian Activities	Equestrian Targets
<p>Policy LTP K14 Health and Leisure The Council will work towards the promotion of transport as a means of improving health and access to leisure for all. To achieve this, the Council will focus on the following:</p> <p>i. Maintenance, promotion and improvement of the rights of way network and other routes for walking, cycling and horse riding</p> <p>Policy LTP K8 Road Safety The Council, as the responsible local Highway Authority, work towards creating a safer road environment for all. To achieve this, the Council will work in partnership where appropriate and focus on the following:</p> <p>ii. Improving safety for vulnerable road users of all ages, such as pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists, and equestrian users.</p>	<p>AT3.1 Complete 2-3 projects per year that increase the length and / or quality of the ROW network available for horse riding</p> <p>AT3.2 Investigate further Quiet Lanes projects to support active travel by 2013 Policy</p>

The LTPs road safety policy (LTP K8) is also relevant to pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians as they are classed as vulnerable users.

West Berkshire's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) 2021 also sets out a strategic and long-term approach to delivering improvements in walking and cycling. The first LCWIP focuses on routes in Newbury and Thatcham and the Eastern Urban Area working jointly with Reading Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council.

The LCWIP has a focus on utility journeys, i.e. those made for commuting, work, healthcare rather than for leisure, but does include some leisure corridors identified through public feedback. These are:

- The Kennet and Avon Canal towpath;
- Links to Bucklebury, Crookham, Greenham, and Snelsmore Commons;
- Links south and west into the quieter lanes of Hampshire and West Berkshire; and
- An indicative link representing the proposal for a cycling and walking route on or close to the former Newbury to Didcot railway line.

Needs of Users

Walkers

Walking is the most popular outdoor recreational activity. Walkers have many areas in which to walk. As well as all types of public rights being available for pedestrians, they can use many other greenspaces, CROW Act land and other spaces.

People walk for a variety of reasons - to get to work or school, to exercise or for leisure and to enjoy the countryside. Health and exercise is the highest motivator nationally and has increased over time, from 34% of visits in 2009/10 to 50% in 2017/18. Walking the dog is a significant motivator and was the second highest motivator nationally in 2017/18, with 38% of people giving this reason.⁶⁹ Choosing to walk instead of taking the car is also increasing. The proportion of the population choosing to walk through greenspace on a journey and/or actively choosing to walk or cycle instead of driving has increased between 2009 and 2018, both up eight percentage points.⁷⁰

The Active Lives Survey carried out by Sport England⁷¹ measures participation in activities. In West Berkshire, those participation in all forms of walking, including walking for leisure, has increased since 2015, in line with the rest of the South East, see Figure 4.⁷² The survey indicates that 55% of people in West Berkshire had walked for leisure at least twice in the past 28 days, and 90% in the past year. When considering walking for any purpose, 67% had walked at least twice in the past 28 days and 90% in the past year. Those living in more deprived areas tend to walk less.

Walking has been described as 'the nearest activity to perfect exercise', being the easiest, most accessible, cost effective, and enjoyable way for most people to increase their physical activity.⁷³ Walking can be particularly important in increasing exercise in inactive people. Information provision, signage and good quality paths, especially in areas of need, all help to support inactive people in walking more.⁷⁴ In areas of deprivation, where access to greenspace may be limited, increasing walking can be a particularly effective and low-cost way of increasing physical activity. In West Berkshire there is an active programme of health walks in West Berkshire, called Wellbeing Walks, which encourage inactive people to walk as a form of exercise.

There are six groups affiliated to the national Ramblers' Association operating within West Berkshire or walking within the area - the West Berkshire Ramblers', Mid Berkshire Ramblers', the Pang Valley Ramblers', the Loddon Valley Ramblers', the Berkshire Walkers (a Ramblers' Association affiliated group for 20 and 30 year olds) and Berkshire Weekend Walkers. There are also other, unaffiliated, walking groups such as the Frilsham Walking Group and the Reading Outdoor Group.⁷⁵ There are also several active Facebook groups.⁷⁶

Figure 4: Participation in Walking and Cycling - West Berkshire and South East England



Cyclists

Cycling is a popular activity, with participation across a wide range of the population. People cycle for many reasons and in many ways – for leisure, for commuting and utility journeys, for sport, as a family and for holidays.

Cycling is only permitted on part of the public rights of way network – on bridleways, restricted byways and BOATs. In many cases use of the road network is necessary to form links between public rights of way.

There is also a network of cycle routes which are not on public rights of way. Some of these are traffic-free and some share roads with traffic. These are provided to support active travel. Cycling provision for leisure and on public rights of way overlap and compliment cycling for active travel and the routes provided for this. Active travel cycling can use public rights of way, and cyclists making utility trips are also likely to cycle for recreation.

Public rights of way offer predominantly traffic-free routes. Broadly this is termed ‘mountain biking’ – but mountains are not required. There are five broad sports disciplines – cross country, trail riding, enduro, downhill and freeride. The main types of cycling which use public rights of way are cross country and trail riding, which use paths and tracks. Enduro, downhill and freeride are downhill sports, along with cyclo-cross which also takes place off road, but riders may also use public rights of way to train or enjoyment.

There are also many cyclists who use traffic-free routes and public rights of way who would not term themselves mountain bikers, but just enjoy leisure cycling. A range of studies show that traffic-free routes

are preferred by all cyclists. Experienced cyclists will cycle on the road, but inexperienced riders, women or those with children and in family groups prefer traffic-free routes. The presence of traffic and a lack of traffic-free routes can be a serious deterrent to these groups and public rights of way are therefore important.

The Active Lives Survey carried out by Sport England⁷⁷ measures participation in cycling for leisure and all cycling. In West Berkshire, those participation in all forms of cycling, including cycling for leisure, has stayed at similar levels since 2015, in line with the rest of the South East, see Figure 4.⁷⁸ The survey indicates that 18% of people in West Berkshire had walked for leisure at least twice in the past 28 days. Most of these had cycled for leisure. 36% had cycled for any purpose in the past year.

Cycling UK offers further insights to cyclists:⁷⁹

- Males tend to cycle more than females
- People in the age range 35 – 54 seem to enjoy cycling for leisure more than other age groups
- 34% of cycling trips are for leisure; however this increased to 55% during the pandemic

In the 2021 survey for this ROWIP, 26% of people said they took part in using public rights of way for cycling on surfaced cycle paths and 25% took part in cycling off-road (e.g. mountain biking).

The use of electric cycles (E-bikes), including E-Mountain Bikes is increasing. This is likely to increase the number of people who are able to cycle off road, bringing the pastime within the capabilities of more people.

Cycling Provision in West Berkshire

Cyclists can use the same network as equestrians (see next section). There are more, and better connected, public rights of way in the north and eastern downland areas, with a high proportion of the network available for cyclists. There is also a concentrated network available for equestrians around Bucklebury.

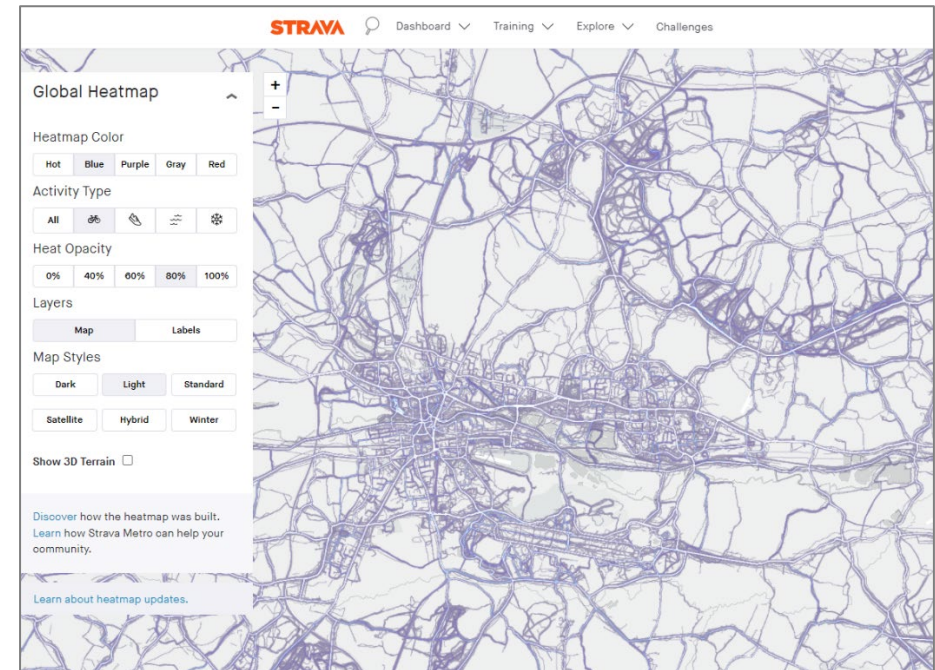
This is contrasted with fewer, disconnected, public rights of way in the south of the district. The Kennet Valley is an area with fewer public rights of way available for cyclists. However, this area is a focus for increasing cycling routes through initiatives and strategies to increase active travel..

Cycle routes and public rights of way available for cyclists are shown in Plan 21. This does not include all of the routes promoted as suitable for cycling in the urban areas. West Berkshire Council's website has a series of leaflets available for download showing these.⁸⁰

National Cycle Route 4 passes through West Berkshire following the Kennet Valley. Much of this route is traffic-free and some follows the towpath. The towpath in particular is a popular leisure route. Cycling is also popular at Greenham Common. There are also cycling routes at Snelmore Country Park.

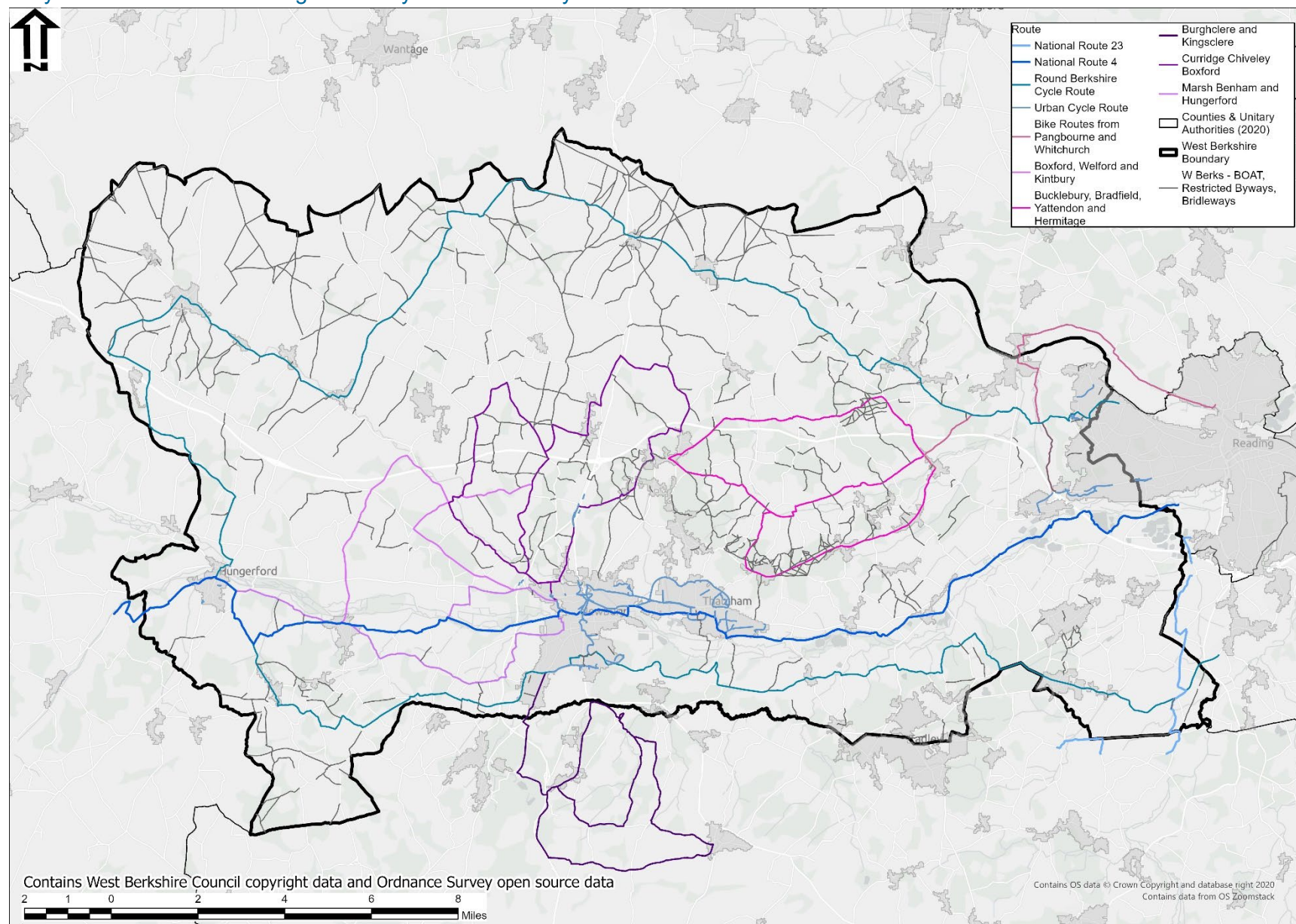
Strava Heatmap⁸¹ provides some insight into popular cycling routes. This logs aggregated activities, logged by users of Strava, during the past year. Figure 5 shows a snapshot of logged cycling activities in the area around Newbury and reveals a high concentration of off-road activity around Bucklebury through to Hermitage, Snelmore Country Park and Greenham Common

Figure 5: Strava Heatmap - Newbury Area⁸²



Strava metro is available to local authorities and could provide further insight into cycling activity and which public rights of way are used more frequently.

Plan 21: Cycle Routes and Public Rights of Way Available for Cyclists



There are several cycling groups in West Berkshire and in the surrounding area, which use routes within the district.

- Cycling UK Reading⁸³
- Newbury Velo⁸⁴
- West Berkshire Spokes⁸⁵
- BOB Mountain Bike Club⁸⁶
- Newbury Road Club⁸⁷
- Reading Cycle Campaign⁸⁸
- Reading Cycle Club⁸⁹
- Buckled Wheel Cycle Club⁹⁰

The West Berkshire cycle forum meets four times a year to discuss cycling issues across the district. The forum is made up of council officers, WBC cycling champion and members of local cycle campaign groups and businesses with an interest in promoting cycling.

Some conflicts between users were raised in the public survey carried out for this ROWIP. Pedestrians and equestrians raised concerns over some cyclists travelled at speed and using public footpaths, which they are not entitled to. Cycling UK offers advice for cyclists on routes shared with horses.⁹¹

Equestrians

Introduction

Recreational equestrianism includes several activities including horse riding in the countryside (hacking) and carriage driving which take place on public rights of way, along with a range of equestrian sporting activity. Equestrianism makes a valuable contribution to the fabric of rural society, and offers a wide range of people, including young children, an excellent way of exploring the countryside.

The National Equestrian Survey 2019⁹² has the following headlines:

- The economic value of the equestrian sector stands at £4.7 billion of consumer spending across a wide range of goods and services each year. This has increased from £4.3 billion in 2015;
- There are 27 million people in Britain with an interest in the equestrian industry;
- There has been an increase in the number of people who have ridden at least once in the past 12 months, to 3 million from 2.7 million in 2015;
- The number of regular riders – those who have ridden at least once a month for the past 12 months – has risen from 1.3 million in 2015 to 1.8 million;
- There are 374,000 horse-owning households in Britain – a drop from the 446,000 in 2015;
- The estimated horse population in Britain stands at 847,000;
- The average frequency of riding – with an average riding time of 52 minutes – is 3.5 times a week.

Horse riding engages a higher proportion than other sports of people with disabilities, women and people over the age of 45. Nearly 40% of those taking part in equestrian activity do not participate in other forms of physical activity.⁹³ Riding or driving horses allows people to participate in exercise outdoors and can provide both physical and mental wellbeing benefits.

The equestrian industry contributes to the economy and supports many jobs. The horse industry is the second largest rural employer after the agriculture industry in the UK.⁹⁴ Equestrianism supports a range of supply industries, including vets, feed merchants, training providers, accommodation, tourism and equipment suppliers.

Carriage drivers can use restricted byways and BOATs and horse riders can use also use public bridleways, but these networks are often disconnected. In many cases use of the road network is necessary to form links between public rights of way but traffic levels and speeds are increasing making it less safe and enjoyable to ride on the road network. 44% of those riding once a week or less say they would ride more frequently if they had access to safe off road riding or bridleways and this is the most cited reason that would make people ride more frequently.⁹⁵

Equestrianism and Provision in West Berkshire

West Berkshire is one of the most densely populated areas in terms of horses in the UK, along with many other parts of south east England.⁹⁶ However, it is difficult to get an accurate overview of the distribution and level of equestrian activity in the district.

Within West Berkshire there are:

- Five Riding Clubs within the district, or based outside but operating in West Berkshire;
- Riding for the Disabled centres in Hungerford, Newbury and Tilehurst;
- Three Pony Clubs;
- Some riding schools, for example Hall Place Equestrian Centre (Tilehurst).

There are also many other active equestrians who are not affiliated to any groups.

There are also livery yards across West Berkshire but the distribution of these is not known. The Berkshire County Riding Club listed 39 livery yards within West Berkshire⁹⁷ in 2005; however this list is likely to be out of date.

The downlands of northern West Berkshire are nationally renowned as the base for horse racing training yards, with a hub of yards around Lambourn in 'The Valley of the Racehorse'. The industry is estimated to make an economic contribution of £22m .

In 2021 there were 8,719 equine passports registered in Defra's Central Equine Database in postcodes RG7, RG8, RG14, RG18, RG19, RG20, RG72, and RG88, although some of these postcodes extend beyond West Berkshire. A minority of these passports may be for racehorses. Assuming a conservative estimate of £5,000 per year to keep a horse, these horses contribute £43m per year to the economy. Spend on horses includes feed, bedding, vets and farriers, saddlery and equipment, livery, training of other professional fees.

It should be noted that passports record the postcode of the home of the owner and, often, horses are not kept at home but are situated on livery yards.

There are active Facebook groups which provide an online community for equestrians, for example:

- Happy Hackers Club West Berkshire
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/196574003710130>
- Ridgeway Horse Riders and Carriage Drivers Access Group
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/269434397066898>
- Berkshire Horse & Pony
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/319446928115416>
- Berkshire and Buckinghamshire Riders
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/296313590407506>

As outlined previously public rights of way which are available for equestrians are not evenly distributed across the district.

There are more, and better connected, public rights of way in the north and eastern downland areas, with a high proportion of the network available for equestrians. The network in the north of the district is better connected although there are some areas where public rights of way do not connect as well. Although there is less traffic in these areas, some of the roads can be busy, as well as being narrow. There is also a high proportion of BOATs which are shared with motorised vehicles. There is also a concentrated network available for equestrians around Bucklebury. While there is a good provision in these areas, this is also away from the main population centres where

many owners live. For many equestrians using this network will require transporting their horse.

This is contrasted with fewer, disconnected, public rights of way in the south of the district. The Kennet Valley is an area with fewer public rights of way available for equestrians along its entire length, see Plan 22. There are no routes at all running east to west along the valley. Although there are scattered routes, and some areas with a small network, for example Beenham and Burghfield Common, most routes are isolated and do not form a network. Therefore roads need to be used to form routes and these can be busy, see Plan X.

In some areas there are suitable public rights of way in north Hampshire, which in places connects to West Berkshire's, but this network is also fragmented, see Plan 22.

There are also some areas of permitted access or toll rides, which provide additional areas for equestrians:

- Greenham Common: Horse riding is allowed by law under the Greenham and Crookham Commons Act 2000. No permit is required. Carriage driving is not allowed and is only by permission;
- Bucklebury, Padworth, Snelsmore and Wokefield Commons: Recreational horse riding is legally allowed on these four commons, which are managed by Schemes of Regulation drawn up under the Commons Act 1899 and Law of Property Act 1925. This is in addition to the bridleways and byways on those commons;
- Englefield Estate: Permits for rides around two areas at Bradfield and Mortimer can be purchased on an annual basis;⁹⁸

- Wasing Estate: States that walking and riding permits are available.⁹⁹

West Berkshire Council's Active Travel Strategy also includes equestrianism, with the following policies and targets.

Equestrian Activities

Policy LTP K14 Health and Leisure
The Council will work towards the promotion of transport as a means of improving health and access to leisure for all. To achieve this, the Council will focus on the following:

- Maintenance, promotion and improvement of the rights of way network and other routes for walking, cycling and horse riding

Policy LTP K8 Road Safety
The Council, as the responsible local Highway Authority, work towards creating a safer road environment for all. To achieve this, the Council will work in partnership where appropriate and focus on the following:

- Improving safety for vulnerable road users of all ages, such as pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists, and equestrian users.

Equestrian Targets

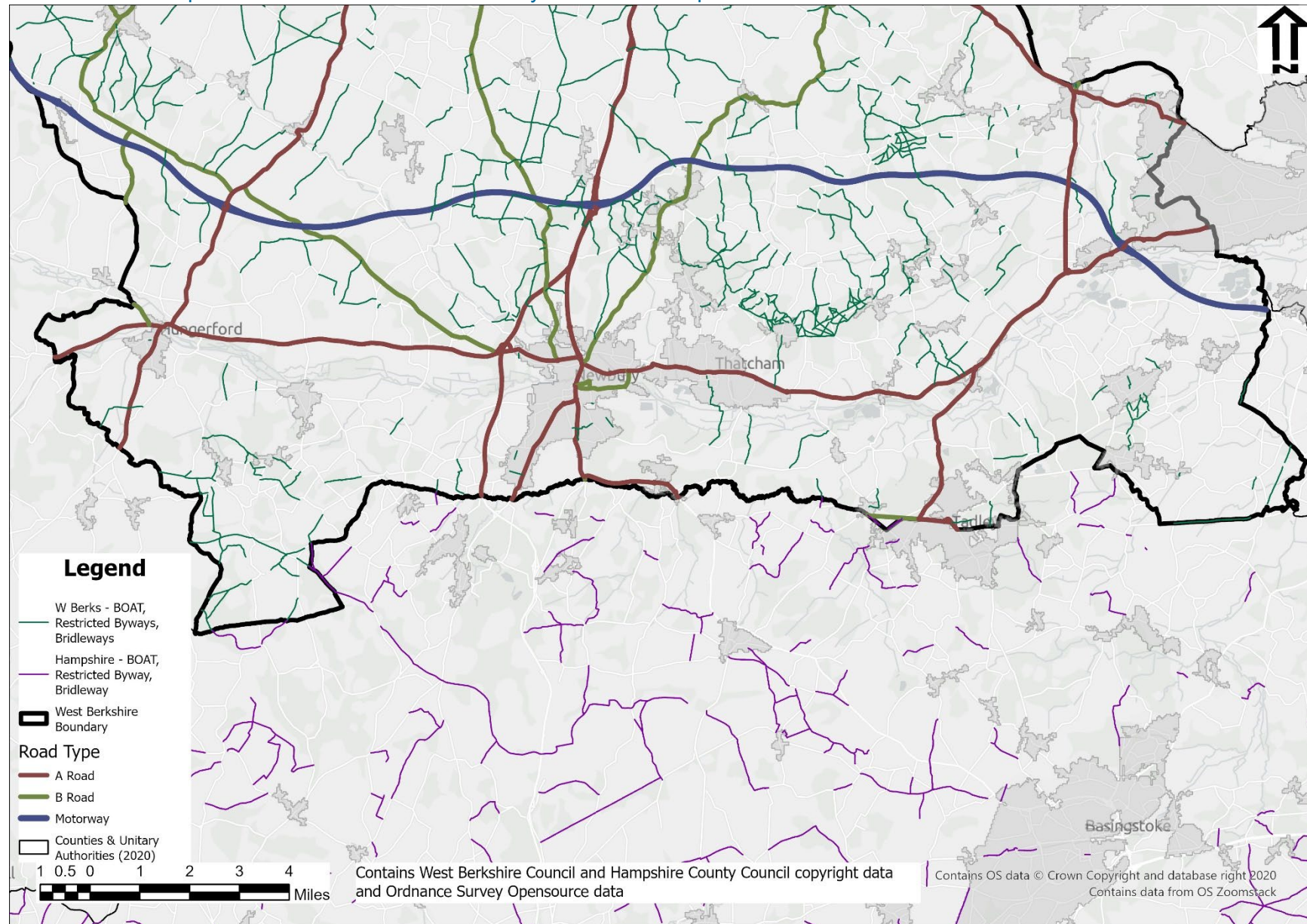
AT3.1 Complete 2-3 projects per year that increase the length and / or quality of the ROW network available for horse riding

AT3.2 Investigate further Quiet Lanes projects to support active travel by 2013 Policy

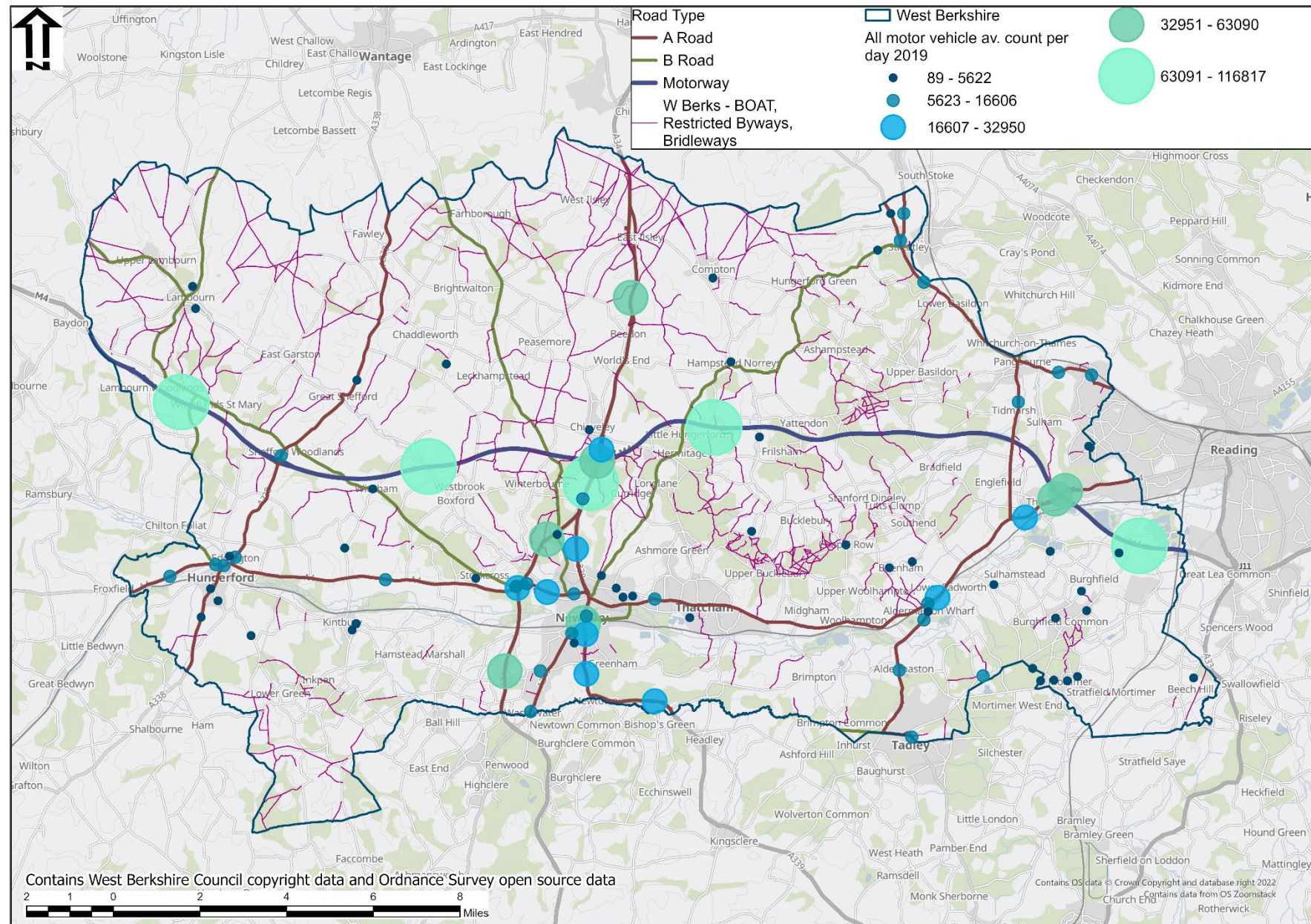
In the public survey carried out in 2021 for this ROWIP equestrians raised the following points regarding and priorities:

- Surfaces which are suitable for equestrian use when re-surfacing bridleways, restricted byways or BOATs (not using rubble or other sharp or potentially damaging materials);
- Issues with other users causing distress to horses, e.g. dogs off lead, motorbikes;
- Increases in road traffic and cars travelling too fast, recounting 'near misses' and describing hacking on some roads as "terrifying";
- More traffic free routes to link up public rights of way where the network is disconnected;
- Create circular routes for equestrians;
- Promotional material for equestrians;
- Good quality and maintained equestrian gates
- Maintaining those routes which can be used by equestrians in good condition, including appropriate surfacing and clearing vegetation.

Plan 22: Network for Equestrians – Focus on Kennet Valley and North Hampshire



Plan 23: Average annual daily flow - Number of vehicles (both directions) on an average day of the year (2019)¹⁰⁰

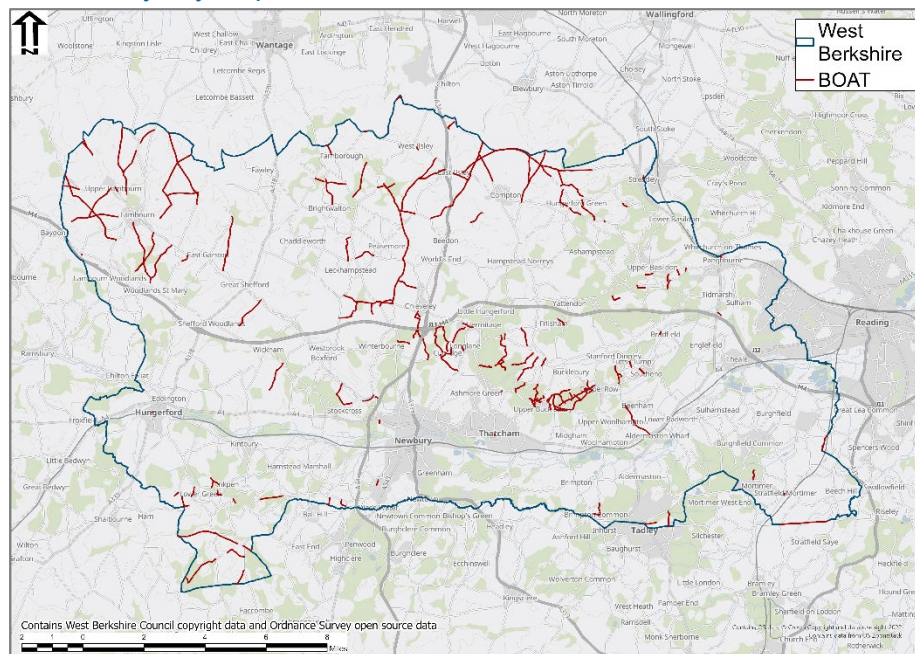


Motorised Vehicle Users

Mechanically propelled vehicle users use a range of vehicles, including 4x4's, trail bikes¹⁰¹ and quad bikes. These users can only use byways open to all traffic (BOATs).

These public rights of way are concentrated in the northern downland areas of West Berkshire, particularly around Lambourne, the central downland area including Brightwalton, East Ilsley, Hungerford Green and south to Chieveley. There is also a concentration of BOATs from Hermitage through to Bucklebury. There is a smaller network around and south of Inkpen. In other areas there are disconnected and sometimes short lengths of BOATs, see Plan 24.

Plan 24: Byways Open to All Traffic



Driving or riding on BOATs is also known as 'green laning'. Some users are part of one of several groups which support these users, including the Green Lane Association¹⁰², LARA (Land Access and Recreation Association),¹⁰³ the All Wheel Drive Club¹⁰⁴ and the Trail Riders Fellowship (TRF).¹⁰⁵ Some of these organisations have local groups in West Berkshire, as well as local organisations such as the Hants and Berks Land Rover Owners Club¹⁰⁶ and the 4x4 Without a Club¹⁰⁷ which operates from a site near Aldermaston. Not all users belong to a club.

The Trail Riders Fellowship also has a Motorcycle Green Road Map which people can register for free and get free access. This shows where people can trail ride legally.¹⁰⁸

In the engagement exercise carried out in 2021 for the ROWIP, motorised vehicle users highlighted the physical and mental health wellbeing benefits that they gain from accessing the countryside. As well as benefits gained from social connection, enjoyment, challenge, and getting out into the countryside, motorised vehicle use enables those who have reduced mobility to access the countryside.

The BOAT network in the downland areas of West Berkshire is longer and better connected than in many other areas. The users of this network are not just originating from the local area but are travelling from further afield to use West Berkshire's BOAT network.¹⁰⁹

Vehicles on public rights of way have caused damage to surfaces. This includes parallel ruts, which make it difficult for other users and in particular cyclists, carriage drivers and equestrians, or major or deliberate damage of path surfaces. Driving without due care and attention or damaging the surface of a byway open to all traffic is an offence.

West Berkshire Council Public Rights of Way Service has a policy paper which sets out the approach to managing damage on public rights of way by motorised vehicles.¹¹⁰ 'First priority' measures include information provision, codes of conduct, liaison with user groups, monitoring and repair of priority routes. 'Second priority' measures, which could be implemented if the first priority measures are not successful, include seasonal or permanent Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) including on part of The Ridgeway National Trail. At the time of this report there are four permanent TROs in place and other closures over the winter months to protect the public rights of way from seasonal damage.¹¹¹

In the public survey carried out in 2021 for this ROWIP concerns were raised over conflicts between motorised and other users. Non-motorised vehicle users raised concerns over deterioration of surfaces and mud, intimidating behaviour and presence on paths that these users are not entitled to use. Conversely, there were comments made from 4 x 4, motorised vehicle / motorbike users about intimidating behaviour towards them from walkers and challenges made over their right to legitimately use BOATs.

LARA¹¹² and the TRF¹¹³ have produced good practice guides for participants and information and guidance on managing motor vehicle access to BOATs. The Ridgeway National Trail has also produced a leaflet and code of conduct for vehicles on The Ridgeway.¹¹⁴

People Living with Visual, Physical or Neurological Impairments

There is great diversity amongst people who live with a disability. Disability takes many different forms and has an impact on people's lives in many ways. The term 'disability' covers a wide range of conditions, including mobility difficulties, blind or partial sightedness, learning difficulties, neurological problems and mental health problems. Some disabilities are permanent whilst others only affect people from time to time. While some people have lived with their disability from birth, most people are those who develop impairments in the course of their life or are simply getting older.

The Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment research has shown that 18% of people with a disability never visit the natural environment, compared with 8% of the non-disabled population. Overwhelmingly the reasons for not visiting the countryside are related to their condition, with 'old age', 'poor health' and 'a physical disability' given by 92% of respondents as the reason for not visiting.¹¹⁵

In the 2021 Census, 5.1% of West Berkshire residents identified as being disabled and their daily life limited a lot. This figure decreased from 6.1% in 2011. In 2021, just under 1 in 10 people (9.6%) were identified as being disabled and their daily life limited a little, compared with 8.7% in 2011. The proportion of West Berkshire residents who were not disabled increased from 85.2% to 85.3%.

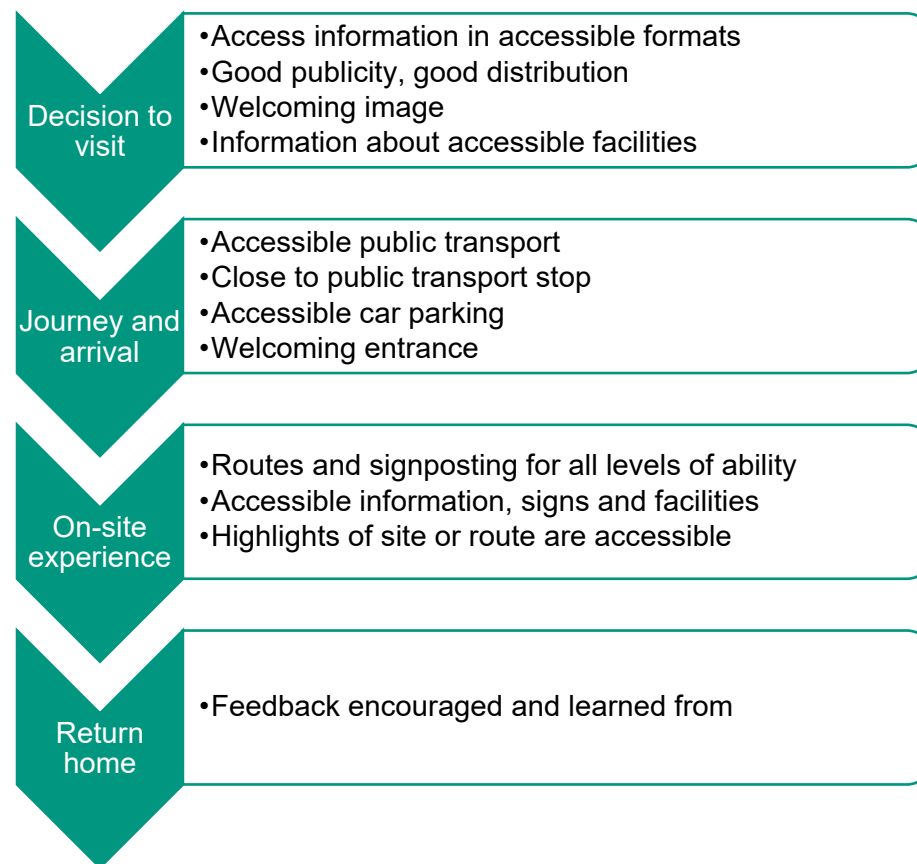
The population of over 65's in West Berkshire was 27.5% in 2020.¹¹⁶ This is higher than national and regional averages. While this does not mean that all of these people will be living with a disability, older age does increase the prevalence of limiting conditions. There is also predicted to be an increase of nearly 20% in the number of those over age 75.

People with an impairment have the same range of interests as the rest of the community – some will be interested in the countryside and some will not. However, there are a range of potential barriers which may deter or prevent disabled people from using countryside sites and visiting the natural environment, many of which could relate to public rights of way:

- Physical barriers, such as steps, steep gradients, stiles and gates;
- Lack of accessible information;
- Lack of accessible toilets;
- Lack of confidence, low expectations, not feeling welcome, fear over safety or of getting lost;
- Too far to walk;
- Lack of convenient and accessible public transport;
- Inaccessible café, shop or visitor centre;
- Lack of seating and opportunities to rest or take shelter;
- Cost of transport, parking fees and refreshments;
- Lack of staff awareness of the needs of disabled visitors;
- A limited range of activities;
- Poorly maintained environment.¹¹⁷

The Sensory Trust¹¹⁸ outlines the ‘access chain’ that leads from a person’s decision to visit a site, through the journey, arrival and visit to a countryside site (see Figure 6). Whilst this relates to visits to a countryside site or country park, these stages also apply to countryside visits using public rights of way. If there is a bad experience in one of these stages the visit may not happen or may not be repeated. It is important, therefore, that attention is paid to each of these links when considering people living with a disability.

Figure 6: Access Chain – Adapted from Sensory Trust



It is clearly not possible to ensure all routes and paths, even in the most visited areas, are fully accessible to all people. However, adopting the principle of ‘least restrictive access’ is important. For example, kissing gates should be installed instead of stiles, the best surfacing possible installed and thought given to gradients, steps etc. Consultation with groups and individuals living with a range of physical, neurological and visual impairments was carried out as part of developing the ROWIP, including Age UK, the Local Access Forum

Disabled Access Group, Mobility Issues Group for Goring and Streatley, Berkshire Vision and West Berkshire Council Sensory Needs Service. A full summary is included in Evidence Report 2.

There are no routes currently promoted for those living with a disability and this was one of the main requests made by consultees.

Documenting the routes used by Walking for Health could be a good way to begin getting a suite of accessible routes together. Another suggestion was developing 'Miles without Stiles' with Snelsmore, Thatcham and Padworth potentially good places to start.

- Accessible infrastructure – it is important to make infrastructure as accessible as possible, for example handrails on steps, bridge and slopes, evenly spaced steps, kissing gates or gaps instead of stiles. This does not necessarily need to be costly but thought needs to be given in the design of structures on paths. Improving the standard to British Standard is needed across the network, over time;
- Maintenance is important – damaged structures, wobbly stiles, present difficulties, especially to visually impaired people. Visually impaired people may worry more about sudden drops, canal edges, slopes or mud than trying to get through a gate or stile – as the other hazards are unknown and unexpected;
- Toilets and seating are important – information on where these are located would be beneficial;
- Visual impaired people often walk with a guide alongside, so wider paths are more suitable;
- Information is needed on levels of accessibility. The provision of more information on the path, surface, infrastructure, gradients, parking and seating can help a person living with a disability to make their own decision on whether the route is suitable for them;

- Bring together representatives from a range of organisations representing people with disabilities to meet with Public Rights of Way team annually.

Minority Ethnic Groups

MENE analysis shows that people from Black and minority ethnic population are less likely to spend time in nature than the total population. However, many people do report spending time in nature at least once a month. Members of the ethnic minority population are more likely to visit parks in towns and cities, often with a greater desire to spend time with family and friends and to learn about the outdoors. Members of the ethnic minority population are more likely to visit parks in towns and cities, often with a greater desire to spend time with family and friends and to learn about the outdoors.¹¹⁹

A report by OPENSspace identifies seven barriers which may prevent ethnic communities from visiting natural spaces:¹²⁰

- Not seeking or including the views of ethnic minority groups in policy and strategy making;
- Lack of foreign language material and (perhaps inadvertently) excluding ethnic minority groups in promotional material;
- Cultural disposition and behavioural codes may inhibit ethnic communities from using natural spaces. They may not consider the countryside as a place for recreation or it may carry undesirable associations from a person's country of origin. Activities such as walking may be considered a 'necessity' rather than a leisure activity. Other factors include strict dress codes (particularly for females) and a lack of single gender activities;

- Ethnic minority communities are likely to be less aware of opportunities and less responsive to information when it does reach them;
- Lack of confidence and negative perceptions of the environment – fear of woodland, fear for safety, lack of other people of the same ethnicity, fear of encountering animals (including dogs) and fear of racism;
- Negative feelings associated with previous experience of the countryside;
- Financial costs and lack of time.

In the 2021 Census, 3.7% of West Berkshire residents identified their ethnic group within the "Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh" category, up from 2.5% in 2011. The 1.2 percentage-point change was the largest increase among high-level ethnic groups in this area. This is lower than the South East England average, which is 7%

In the public survey in 2021 for the ROWIP, most people answering the survey were White or White British (97.2%). This is higher than the West Berkshire population which the 2021 Census records at 91.9%. This means that other ethnic groups were less represented in the survey than in the West Berkshire population.

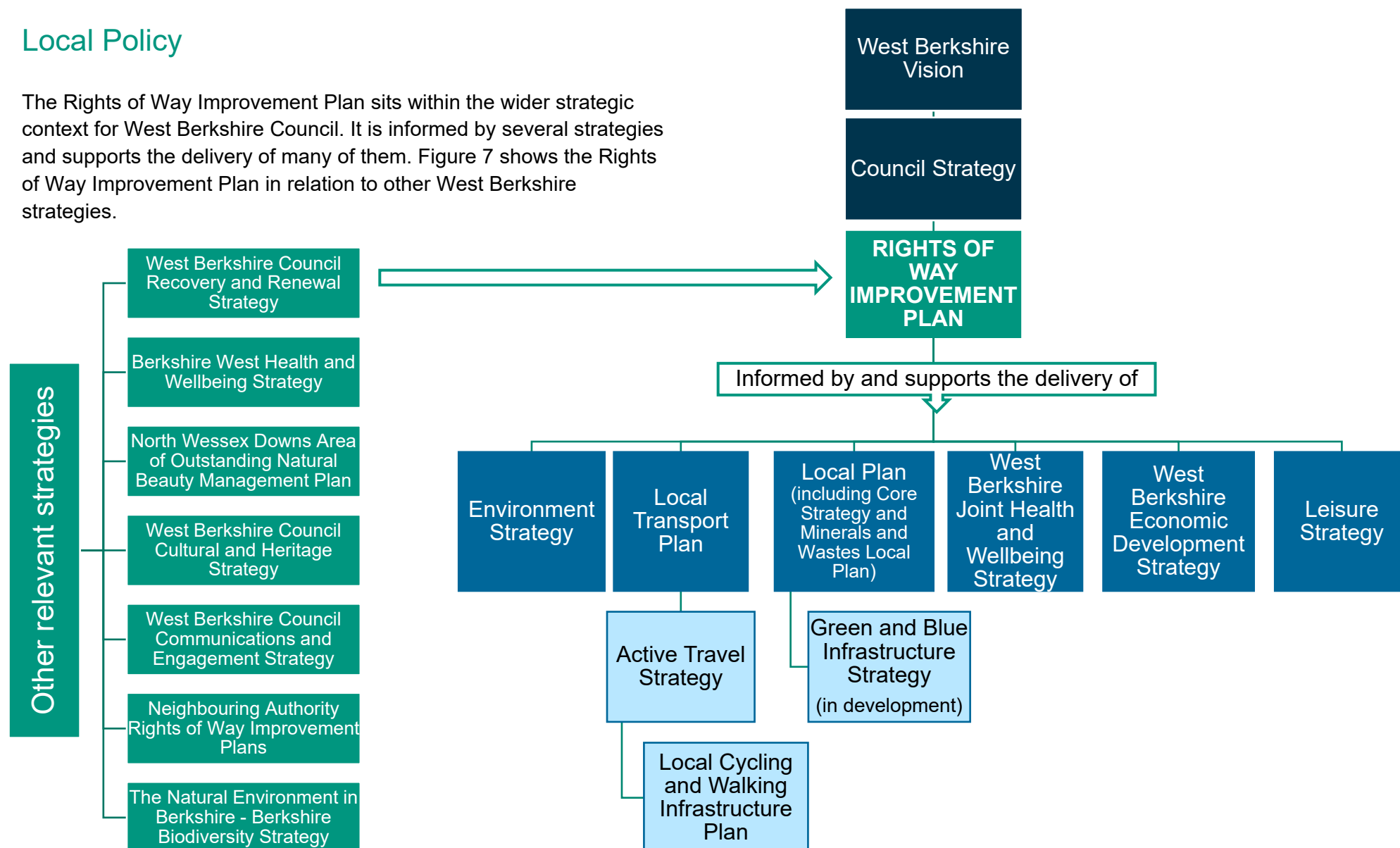
An interview was held with Community United as part of developing the ROWIP and there are opportunities to increase engagement with minority ethnic communities through this and other organisations.

Policy Context

Figure 7: West Berkshire Related Strategies

Local Policy

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan sits within the wider strategic context for West Berkshire Council. It is informed by several strategies and supports the delivery of many of them. Figure 7 shows the Rights of Way Improvement Plan in relation to other West Berkshire strategies.



West Berkshire 2036 – The West Berkshire Vision

The West Berkshire Vision sets out the aspirations of West Berkshire Council and its partners for the future of West Berkshire. It sets out five areas of commitment:

- We will have delivered a West Berkshire where everybody has what they need to fulfil their potential;
- We will have delivered a West Berkshire with a housing mix with something for everyone;
- We will have delivered a West Berkshire that welcomes business, enterprise and industry into a productive, growing and dynamic local economy;
- We will have delivered a West Berkshire where the health and wellbeing of residents of all ages is good;
- We will have delivered a West Berkshire with both beautiful and diverse natural landscapes and a strong cultural offering.

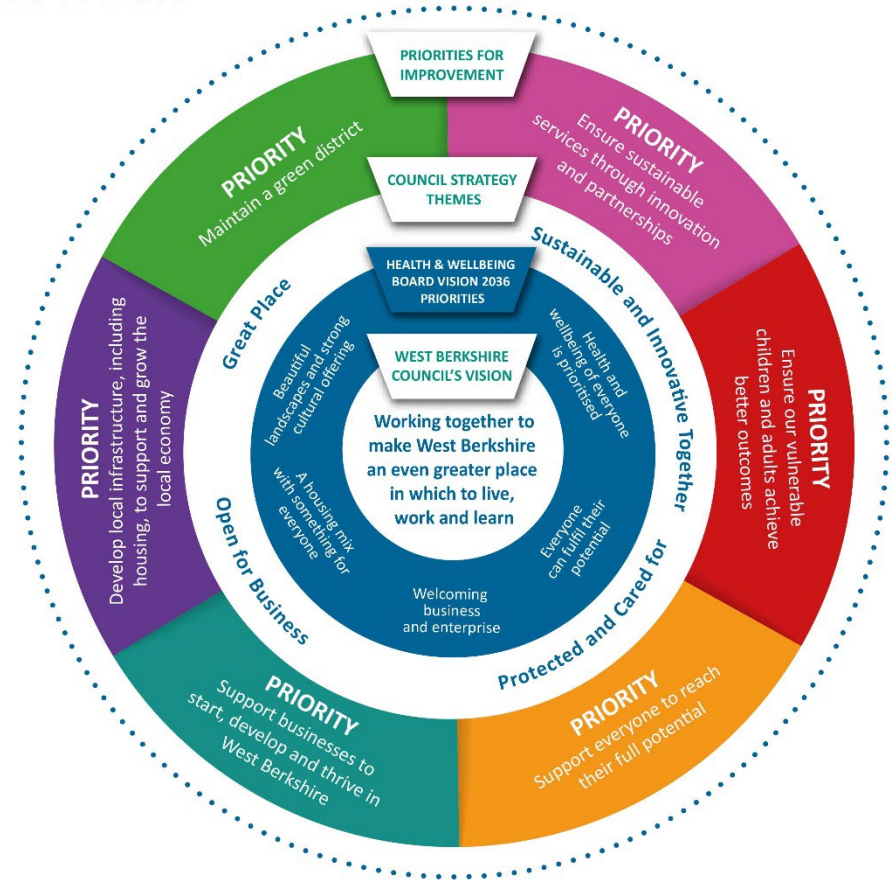
Council Strategy (2019 - 2023)

The Council Strategy sets out six priorities for improvement;

- Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships;
- Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes;
- Support everyone to reach their full potential;
- Support businesses to start, develop and thrive in West Berkshire;
- Develop local infrastructure, including housing, to support and grow the local economy;
- Maintain a green district.

A revised Council Strategy is being developed at the time of this report.

West Berkshire Council Strategy 2019-2023



Environment Strategy (2020 - 2030)

West Berkshire's Environment Strategy sets out a vision for West Berkshire's environment. The Strategic Priorities are:

- Carbon Neutral by 2030 - The council itself aims to be carbon neutral in its own operations by 2030;
- Responsible Economic Growth - decoupling economic growth from climate change emissions and influencing business towards carbon neutrality;
- Healthy Communities - highlights the link between active lifestyles, good air quality and access to green and blue spaces and encouraging active travel;
- Resilient to Climate Change - Adaptation to climate change impacts, for example flood management and reducing vulnerabilities;
- Working with our Communities and Partners - working with communities to raise awareness and support everyone to work towards climate neutrality.

West Berkshire Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2017 - 2020

The Health and Wellbeing Strategy is a long-term strategy for meeting the health and wellbeing needs of the local population.

The Vision for Health and Wellbeing in West Berkshire is to enable communities to live healthy lives and to close the gap between communities that are doing well and those that need help

The overarching principles that drive the strategy are:

- The people of West Berkshire will live longer, healthier lives;
- Fewer people will die prematurely;
- The gap in healthy life expectancy between the most vulnerable and least well off in the district and the rest will be reduced.

Leisure Strategy 2022

West Berkshire Council's Leisure Strategy 2022 focusses on 'active leisure' where the activity involves physical effort that will deliver health and wellbeing benefits to the individual.

The vision of the strategy is that *'By 2032 we will have an increased participation in active leisure for all, with a particular focus on those least active, through access to a network of modern and sustainable indoor facilities together with a diverse mix of accessible public outdoor sports facilities and greenspace and bluespace.'*

Aims of Leisure Strategy 2022 – Relevant to Public Rights of Way:

1. Increase participation for all, with an emphasis on those less physically active, and maintain improved activity levels throughout lives;
4. Measurably enhance access to, and utilisation of greenspace and blue space, through improving accessibility to open water, waterways, parks, commons and Public Rights of Way;
5. Further develop partnerships (with town and parish councils, sport governing bodies, health organisations and the voluntary sector), with an emphasis on actively encouraging volunteering.

Local Transport Plan: Active Travel Strategy 2011 – 2026 and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan 2021

West Berkshire's Active Travel Strategy 2011-2026 forms part of the suite of documents making up the Local Transport Plan (LTP). The strategy includes walking, cycling and equestrian activities. The Active Travel Strategy is due to be reviewed in 2023-24.

There are many overlaps between public rights of way and active travel, and public rights of way can be used as active travel routes. There are several policies in the Active Travel Strategy which are relevant to the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

West Berkshire's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) 2021 also sets out a strategic and long-term approach to delivering improvements in walking and cycling. The first LCWIP focuses on routes in Newbury and Thatcham and the Eastern Urban Area working jointly with Reading Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council.

The LCWIP has a focus on utility journeys, i.e. those made for commuting, work, healthcare rather than for leisure, but does include some leisure corridors.

Core Strategy Development Plan and Local Plan

The West Berkshire adopted Local Plan is a long-term strategic document used by West Berkshire Council to set out its vision and a framework for the future development of the area. It is made up of several documents which together form planning policy for the district.

The strategic housing sites are located in south and east Newbury, with smaller sites elsewhere in the district.

Public rights of way are included in the green infrastructure policy of the Core Strategy (CS18). This set out the need to protect and enhance green infrastructure, address deficiencies and protect against loss.

West Berkshire Economic Development Strategy

The Economic Development Strategy is arranged under three themes:

People

- Empowering everyone to enter the workplace
- Employment support for the newly unemployed and underemployed
- Encourage uptake of apprenticeships
- Support Newbury College's University Centre
- Help to grow digital skills
- Work with partners to improve careers advice

Places

- Delivering sustainable development, reshaping town centres
- Supporting businesses to diversify
- Enhance the leisure offering

Infrastructure

- Support delivery of the Environment Strategy's green infrastructure targets
- Digital infrastructure
- Ensure affordable housing delivery
- Enhance intelligent and sustainable transport infrastructure

Shared Objectives

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan shares objectives with several of the primary West Berkshire strategies, see Table 9 and Figure 8.

Table 9: Shared Objectives

Objectives	West Berkshire Vision	Council Strategy	West Berkshire Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy	Leisure Strategy	Local Transport Plan: Active Travel Strategy Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan	Core Strategy Development Plan and Local Plan	Environment Strategy	West Berkshire Economic Development Strategy
Supporting health and mental wellbeing, tackling health inequalities and improving health outcomes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Improving quality of life	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Increasing levels of physical activity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Increasing active travel	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Climate change mitigation and adaptation	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	
Improving West Berkshire's environment and green infrastructure	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
A strong economy, respecting the environment and improving outcomes for all	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
Involving and empowering local people	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Effective and efficient delivery of council services		✓	✓	✓			✓	

Figure 8: Shared Objectives – Rights of Way Improvement Plan and Primary West Berkshire Strategies



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²⁹ Ten pages of results were returned and the West Berkshire Council public rights of way webpage did not feature within these returned results.

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Family Walks in Berkshire - 2.6k members
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1194642000911341>

Berkshire Countryside Walks - 7.5k members
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/554041271662667>

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- ¹⁰⁶ <http://www.hbro.co.uk/index.html>
- ¹⁰⁷ <http://www.4x4-withoutaclub.co.uk/index.htm> and <https://www.facebook.com/groups/128038345295>
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