

Green corridors

Definition

- 12.1 This open space type includes coastal areas, towpaths along canals and riverbanks, cycleways, rights of way and disused railway lines with the primary purpose to provide opportunities for walking, cycling and horse riding whether for leisure purposes or travel and opportunities for wildlife migration.

Figure 12.1 – Footpath in Titchmarsh



PPG17 – the role of green corridors

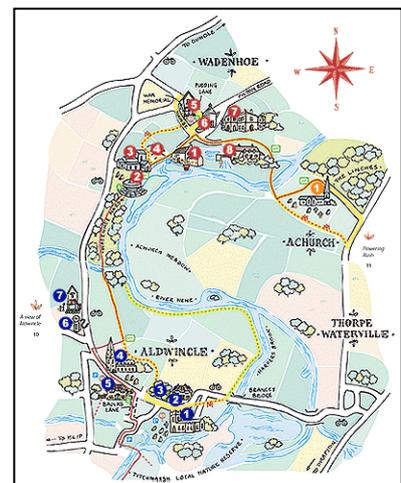
- 12.2 With regards to green corridors the emphasis of PPG17 appears to be on urban areas. It uses the typology from the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce Report that is an 'urban typology'.
- 12.3 Furthermore, elements of PPG17 are contradictory to the companion guide on this issue, where despite PPG17 suggesting that all corridors, including those in remote rural settlements should be included, the Companion Guide suggests that unless a green corridor is used as a transport link between facilities i.e. home and school, town and sports facility etc, it should not be included within an audit.
- 12.4 Although the role that all green corridors play in the provision of open space and recreation within local authority areas is recognised, the focus is however on important urban corridors and public rights of way (PROW).

Strategic context and consultation

- 12.5 The importance of Green Corridors is recognised within the Regional Spatial Strategy for the East Midlands. The development of green corridors is central to two of the key objectives identified, specifically:
- develop sustainable transport routes to include walking and cycling
 - promote the environmental and social benefits of a green infrastructure.
- 12.6 Additionally, Policy 34 of this document promotes the development of river corridors for recreational purposes, recognising the increasing importance of walking, cycling and bridle routes in the regeneration of urban areas. The Nene Valley Way is set out as a specific example.
- 12.7 Green Corridors are a central focus in the Northamptonshire Green Infrastructure project (as highlighted in section 3). This is a key strategic document suggesting delivery mechanisms for the future development and enhancement of green spaces and linkages, including green corridors. The document highlights key principles for delivery of the future green spaces, of which a key element is the maintenance, development and enhancement of linkages and green corridors.
- 12.8 The Northamptonshire County Wide Public Rights of Way (PROW) Improvement plan is currently out for consultation. The document is a five-year strategy setting out the structure the management of the local rights of way network. The key aims of the document include:
- improve the standard of maintenance and the quality of PROW
 - support and link communities and services
 - increase the amount of PROW.
- 12.9 A key element and outcome of the consultation programme is the prioritisation of issues and the resulting development of action plans. This strategy is supported by the East Northamptonshire Community Strategy which highlights the promotion and development of leisure activities based on walking, cycling, riding and canoeing as a priority.

Figure 12.2 - River Nene Walk

- 12.10 Green corridors in East Northamptonshire are one of the most frequented types of open space with 19% of the household survey respondents choosing this type of open space as the type they visit most frequently and 85% using green corridors frequently. The Nene Valley Way walk was highlighted as a particularly popular route.
- 12.11 There are a wide variety of routes in the district including circular walking routes around some of the villages (for example Fotheringhay, Woodnewton and Aldwinckle) and longer routes through local nature reserves which include trails leading to hides to



observe wildlife. There are also a number of cycle routes including the National Cycle Byway through Rockingham Forest and the five cycle loops which include Oundle.

- 12.12 There is a good level of information available regarding the walks, cycle routes and leaflets and guidebooks and maps are available from Tourist Information Centres. Additionally, www.focusnorthamptonshire.org.uk provides a good base of information with rated walks and maps online. Despite this, a key theme at the drop in sessions was a lack of awareness of local PROW.

Current position

- 12.13 Consultation highlighted that residents are keen to see networks of footpaths extended. The disused railway line has been highlighted by a number of residents as an opportunity to create an extensive green corridor that would link other open space and housing estates together. This concept is supported within the current East Northamptonshire SPG, which suggests that green corridors should be incorporated into schemes, linking parcels of structural and amenity open spaces both with other sites and existing and planned developments.
- 12.14 Quality issues on some routes were highlighted, the majority of which related to the surfaces of the footpath and their susceptibility to flooding. Overhanging trees and styles were also considered problematic, specifically for those people trying to access routes in wheelchairs or with pushchairs.
- 12.15 The Wildlife Trust reinforces the suggestion that the formation of green corridors will enhance access to sites for people and for wildlife. The Highways Agency highlights the requirement for a sustainable environment, and emphasises the need to promote and develop walking, cycling and public transport links.
- 12.16 The County Council have established funding, running until March 2006 to erect interpretation boards relating to the PROW in villages. Parishes will be prioritised in conjunction with the Parish Councils. This represents a good opportunity for Parish Councils within East Northamptonshire to address the lack of awareness of green corridors within the area and to promote the use of green corridors.

Setting provision standards

- 12.17 In setting local standards for Green Corridors there is a need to take into account any national or local standards, current provision, other Local Authority standards for appropriate comparison, site assessments and consultation on local needs. There is also a special need to take into account the advice and guidance of PPG17. Full justifications for the local standards are provided within Appendix K, L and M.

Quantity

- 12.18 The Annex A of PPG17 – Open Space Typology states:

*“the need for Green Corridors arises from the need to promote environmentally sustainable forms of transport such as walking and cycling within urban areas. This means that **there is no***

**RECOMMENDED
LOCAL STANDARD**

**No Local Standard to be
set**

sensible way of stating a provision standard, just as there is no way of having a standard for the proportion of land in an area which it will be desirable to allocate for roads. “

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

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

Quality

12.20 There are no real national standards for green corridors although the Countryside Agency does suggest that what the user should expect to find is:

- i) a path provided by the protection and reinforcement of existing vegetation;
- ii) ground not soft enough to allow a horse or cycle to sink into it
- iii) a path on unvegetated natural surfaces

12.21 Respondents to the household survey indicated that they would like to see good quality footpaths that are clean and litter free, and a focus on the natural environment and conservation.

12.22 Although the primary issues raised in the questionnaire regarding green corridors centred around dog fouling and litter, the quality of green corridors is considered to be good on the whole and sites are well used. Some corridors are however becoming

overgrown and footpaths are not clear, restricting the level of use. This was also reflected in drop in sessions and internal consultations where it was agreed that the quality of green corridors in East Northamptonshire is varying.

12.23 The recommended local standard provides the vision for any new provision and also a benchmark for existing green corridors to achieve in terms of enhancement. Green Corridors and open space linkages can play a major role not only in increasing the use of open space, but also in reducing the reliance on public transport and increasing levels of physical activity. The standard incorporates locally defined priorities and takes into account the low levels of awareness of existing green corridors.

12.24 The Parish Path Warden Scheme, developed by the County Council will be key to achieving the quality vision for East Northamptonshire. Volunteers are nominated by the Parish Council (and appointed by the County Council) to walk the green corridors and provide a full report, identifying any issues for development. This will enable constant monitoring and ongoing improvements to sites.

QUALITY VISION

A clean, well-maintained, safe and secure natural corridor reinforced by well kept and controlled natural vegetation with defined, level and well drained pathways that links major open spaces together and provides ancillary facilities such as bins and seating in appropriate places. Major green corridor routes should be appropriately signed both to and within the sites.

Accessibility

- 12.25 There is no realistic requirement to set catchments for such an open space typology as they cannot be easily influenced through planning policy and implementation and are very much opportunity-led rather than demand-led.

**RECOMMENDED
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No Local Standard to be set

Links with Health Agenda

- 12.26 Green corridors represent an important chance to link open spaces within the urban area and to promote transport by cycle and walking. These opportunities for informal recreation will help towards keeping the public active and improving health within the local area.

- 12.27 The latest government plan published by the Department for Transport and entitled “Walking and Cycling: an action plan” states:

“Walking and cycling are good for our health, good for getting us around, good for our public spaces and good for our society, For all these reasons we need to persuade more people to choose to walk and cycle more often”

- 12.28 Therefore it is important to address any qualitative deficiencies of existing green corridors and capitalise on any opportunities to increase and enhance the existing network.

Applying provision standards

- 12.29 Given that it is not appropriate to set any local quantity or accessibility standards. It is also not appropriate to state areas of deficiency or need.
- 12.30 The aim is to provide an integrated network of high quality green corridors linking open spaces together and opportunities for informal recreation and alternative means of transport

Summary and recommendations

GC1	Green corridors provide opportunities close to peoples homes for informal recreation, particularly walking and cycling, as part of every day routines, for example, travel to work or shops. The development of a linked green corridor network will help to provide opportunities for informal recreation and improve the health and well-being of the local community.
GC2	Future development needs to encompass linkage provision between large areas of open space, create opportunities to develop the green corridor network and utilise potential development sites such as dismantled railway lines and cross country nature trails that already exist across East Northamptonshire.
GC3	The provision and promotion of green corridors are central to the wider strategic context, meeting with the priorities of both East Northamptonshire Community Plan and Regional Spatial Strategy.

SECTION 12 – GREEN CORRIDORS

GC4	The County Council funding scheme represents an important opportunity to improve the quality of green corridors and the awareness of the Public Rights of Way Networks. This scheme should be supported.
GC5	The North Northamptonshire Green Infrastructure Study will set out the key priorities and areas for development for both North Northamptonshire, and specifically for East Northamptonshire.