



Beyond the Green Belt

The Vision for Rural Cycling

About Cycling UK

Cycling UK (formerly CTC) inspires and helps people to cycle and keep cycling, whatever kind of cycling they do or would like to do. Over a century's experience tells us that cycling is more than useful transport; it makes you feel good, gives you a sense of freedom and creates a better environment for everyone.

As a registered charity, we help millions of people to start cycling and keep cycling. We are the cyclists' champion.



Share the trails, share the smiles.



View from a different saddle.

Contact Cycling UK

Cycling UK

Parklands
Railton Road
Guildford
Surrey
GU2 9JX

Tel: 01483 238 300
Email: campaigns@cyclingsuk.org
Web: www.cyclingsuk.org

Material from the report may be reproduced in any form for the purpose of campaigning and in the promotion of cycle use, provided Cycling UK is acknowledged.

Photo credits: Photos copyright Cycling UK except: Page 7 & 14 Anthony DeHeveningham, Bristol Trails Group; Page 9 Roger Geffen, Cycling UK; Page 12 Graeme Peacock, Bridleway close to Moel Famau in the Clwydian hills; Page 15 Andrew Nelson, Open MTB; Page 17 & 18 Sam Jones, Cycling UK; Page 21 Tom Hutton, MTB Guiding.

Copyright © 2018 Cycling UK. All rights reserved.

Report author: Cherry Allan, Campaigns Information Officer.

Contents

TITLE	PAGE
Foreword	5
Introduction	6
1. What's beyond the Green Belt for cycling?	7
Motivations	7
2. The Catches	9
On-road connections: can we really go on like this?	9
Just get off and push?	9
Where are we?	10
Narrow appeals	10
Admin nightmares and time pressures.....	10
Sam's case study: fragments of a town to country cycle trip	11
3. Our Vision	12
Rural cycling: top ten essentials	12
Visionary legislation	12
Trails for Wales	12
The footpath question	13
Outdoor Access Wales	14
Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013	14
Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003	15
England	15
The Surrey Hills.....	16
Dreaming of a better network: mechanisms	17
Rights of Way Improvement Plans (RoWIPs)	17
Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs)	17
RoWIPs + LCWIPs	18
Speed limits and traffic calming.....	18
Planning departments	18
Grants and subsidies for landowners	18
Dreaming of a better network: old railways, National Trails & Parks, and themed loops	18
4. Making it happen	21
Further reading	22

Rides of Way Survey Results

65%

Of those using footpaths quote

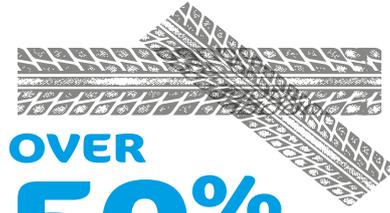
lack of choice



to avoid traffic danger



52%



OVER
50%

back increased access as the number one off-road campaign goal

61%

say off-road cycling is their primary form of exercise



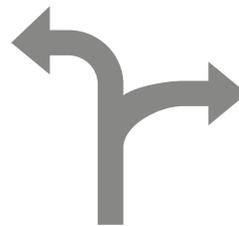
91%

rate off-road cycling fairly or very important for their mental health



90%

say off-road cycling is fairly or very important for their physical health



consider the rights of way system unsuitable



74%

we are
cycling
The cyclists' champion UK

2/3

cycle from their door to ride on Rights of Way



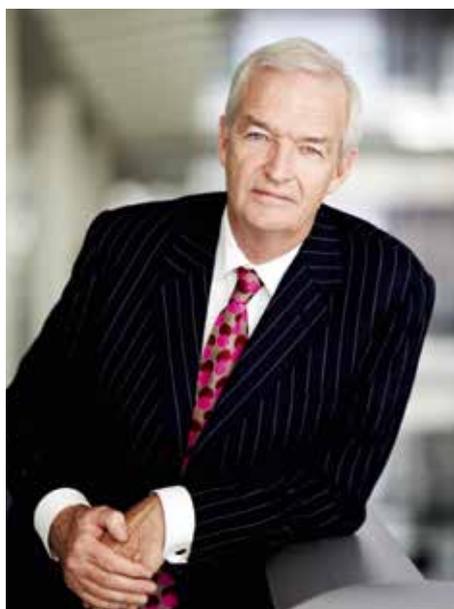
Foreword

Cycling UK has been shouting about the joys and benefits of cycling in the countryside for 140 years. The machines might be different today, with a range of e-bikes, utility, road, gravel, and mountain bikes to choose from, but the sense of adventure remains the same.

From winning the rights to use the Royal Parks in 1885, to gaining the right to cycle on bridleways and long distance country trails in 1968, and then successfully campaigning for the 'Right to Roam' in Scotland in 2003, Cycling UK has always led the way in promoting off-road access. Cycling in the countryside is not, however, limited to off-road riding, with many people enjoying both on and off-road routes, often on the same ride.

It's because we know how fantastic rural cycling is, and the benefits it can bring not just to those on bikes but to rural communities as well, that we want to make it easier for people to share this experience. We need to get more people in the saddle and enjoying our great outdoors, and this means breaking down the barriers that put them off.

After surveying nearly 11,500 cyclists for our Rides of Way report (2017), we have a better understanding of what people want when they ride in the countryside, what they get out of it, and the things that can discourage them, such as access restrictions and difficulty finding routes. We needed that information to help us with this document: our vision for what we want cycling in the countryside to look and feel like, our vision for rural cycling beyond the Green Belt.



Jon Snow
Cycling UK President

We want cycling to be a safe and convenient activity in rural areas; something which is seen as a natural means of recreation, enjoyment, travel, and fun. This isn't just important for those venturing into the countryside, it's also vital for those who live there, so they can go about their daily lives on foot and by bike without having to use the busiest roads. That means developing and promoting motor traffic-free routes, and making sure those routes connect with safe quiet roads.

There's much to be gained if we can achieve this vision, from the physical and mental health benefits for those pedalling either for pleasure or transport, to the economic return from increased tourism in rural areas. I hope you share our vision, and I look forward to your help in making sure we achieve it.

Introduction

The Green Belt: it's official, precious and we owe it a great deal. For decades, it's been curbing the sprawl of UK cities and towns and, perhaps miraculously, we've so far insisted on keeping it. And we've done that because, collectively and instinctively, we know we need a life beyond concrete, beyond buildings wherever we look, and away from roads packed with motor traffic.

In other words, we know the value of green space.

But are we fully recognising and celebrating what the Green Belt's done for us? Are we making the most of the land it's preserved? Are we helping as many people as possible treasure and understand it all the better because they're regularly in direct and physical contact with it? Are we capitalising on its fun side? Cycling UK thinks not.

Escaping into and enjoying the natural environment, we believe, isn't currently the practical possibility it could be for everyone. This is especially so for those who want to experience the landscape actively on their bikes, rather than admire its beauty from behind a windscreen.



Green Belt generations.

This report is primed and energised by all 140 years of Cycling UK's engagement with the recreational, adventure and social aspects of the activity we love. This is our vision for rural cycling, a push to get more people out in the countryside, further, and wanting more.

Critically, we see this as a concerted push, fuelled by us, our allies and supporters, road and touring cyclists, the mountain biking community, people working for National Parks and Trails, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), landowners, councils, politicians, the health sector, the public and, of course, all lovers of the land we prize beyond the Green Belt.

What if ...?

Currently in England and Wales, only a fifth of public rights of way is available for cycling, and getting onto or between them often involves riding along busy roads; and only two of the fifteen National Trails are fully open to cyclists.

But just imagine what cycling in the countryside would be like if cyclists:

- Could ride on some of the 80% of the network they can't use now;
- Were able to access more of the National Trails;
- Could enjoy recreational rides which linked cycle-friendly quiet roads to rights of way;
- Were welcomed to National Parks which appreciated the benefits of promoting cycling.

Welcome to the vision.

1. What's beyond the Green Belt for cycling?

Town and city cycling tends to focus on using bikes for transport - to get to work, school, college, shops - and, of course, residents of rural communities make cycle trips like this too. The 'utility' aspect doesn't mean that people don't or can't enjoy this kind of cycling, and Cycling UK wants it to grow into the natural choice for adults and children of all ages, abilities and backgrounds.

Arguably, though, cycling in the countryside has the edge on fun: awaydays with family and friends; unforgettable views, National Trails, National Parks, AONBs, forests and woodlands; clean air and peace, village tea and cake shops, foxes and fieldfares, and, if you're more of an extremist, gravel, rocks, tree stumps and seas of mud.



What goes up must come down, eventually!

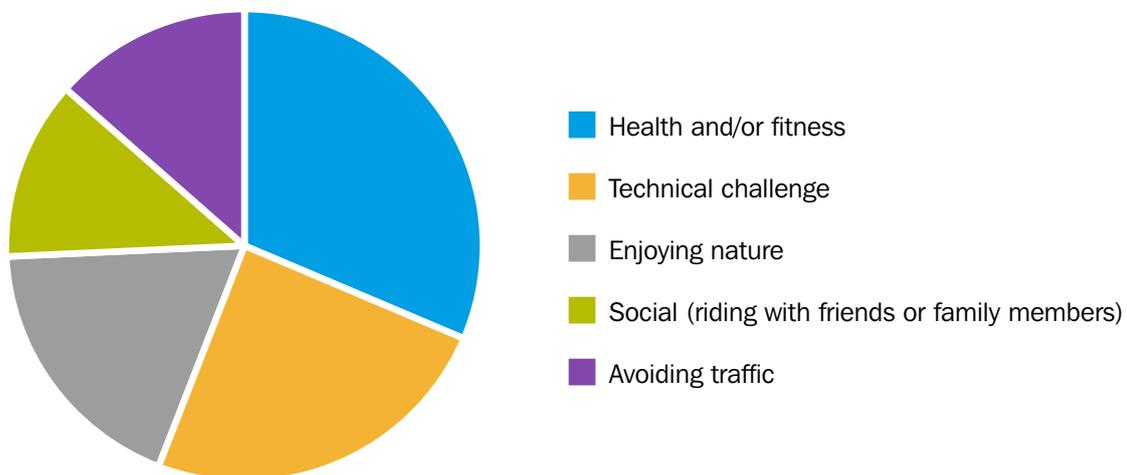
Motivations

Cycling UK knows for a fact that cycling off-road is already immensely meaningful to thousands of people. Our Rides of Way survey, published in 2017, attracted responses from nearly 11,500 riders, two-thirds of whom told us they'd been enjoying the activity for over a decade.

And their chief motivation? Health and fitness, with 90% saying that cycling off-road was 'very' or 'fairly' important to their physical health, and the same percentage ranking it likewise for their mental wellbeing. Indeed, with 61% telling us that off-road cycling is, in fact, their primary form of exercise, all moves to make the countryside more reachable by bike must be welcomed by a health service swamped with the consequences of physically inert lifestyles.

But health and wellbeing aren't the only inspirations: our respondents told us that technical challenge, enjoying nature, social riding and avoiding traffic are significant enticements too.

Top motivations for riding off-road



The rural pedalling pound

With so many people inspired by cycling, Cycling UK is keen to see local rural businesses and communities thrive on its commercial potential.

Whether they're off-road, on-road, or mix it up, cyclists spend money in local pubs, cafés and restaurants, they book into hostels and B&Bs, they visit National Parks, monuments and wildlife reserves – many are, essentially, tourists out to enjoy themselves with a budget.

This isn't guesswork. We know that destinations that appeal to cyclists do make money out of them. The accumulated return is already substantial in Scotland: the total estimated value of cycle tourism was £345 million in 2015, with another £141.4 million brought in from mountain biking: nearly £500 million all told.

Obviously, the more energy a destination puts into attracting cycling clients, the more return they are likely to get. It might even help tempt visitors to convert a day trip into an overnight stay, or longer – and spend more. Offering a package of the kind of facilities cyclists appreciate therefore makes sense: high quality trails and trail centres, waymarking, cycle parking, cycle-friendly cafés and nice toilets (please – a top priority for over half of our women Rides of Way survey respondents), for example.

With cycle tourism bringing in around half a billion pounds each year to Scotland, achieving our vision for cycling beyond the Green Belt in England and Wales could potentially benefit the UK economy by over a billion pounds each year!



Peak District National Park, Parsley Hay Cycle Hire Centre

2. The Catches

On-road connections: can we really go on like this?

Research shows that the health benefits of cycling far outweigh the risks, but the hostile road conditions that put people off are a real concern. Rural A roads are a particular problem: there are more serious collisions and injuries to cyclists on them for every billion miles cycled than on urban A roads. Even ignoring the numbers, many people simply don't feel safe cycling in this kind of environment.

Yet, most of us need to use stretches of road to get onto rural trails and paths: our survey found that 66% of our respondents cycled from their front door to the rights of way network, as opposed to driving.

What, for instance, about the family wanting to cycle along a motor-traffic free path on a Sunday afternoon? What if they can't find a quiet road leading them there? And, for those who do manage to hit the trails, what if they're cut short by a busy 60mph road, leaving them searching for a safe place to cross so that they can pick up an off-road path on the other side - possibly not even straight across, but staggered and some way up the road?

The very thought of having to pedal along an A road with young children to find a link to a quiet path or road is enough for some parents to rule out a cycling adventure in the countryside in the first place.

The roads, then, are by no means always the perfect introduction to the off-road network. All too many don't feel safe and/or are positively scary for novices, fail to link up easily and obviously with the off-road routes available, if at all, and sometimes lack useful signposting, thereby keeping the delights around them entirely secret.

Alternative, well-signed connections via other off-road routes or quiet/quietened roads are the answer.

Just get off and push?

We also learnt from our Rides of Way survey that even experienced and regular off-roaders in England and Wales don't always find their kind of riding trouble-free. For many, their trips are fragmented, frustrating and confusing.

Almost three-quarters said they didn't feel the existing Public Rights of Way network in England and Wales is suitable for modern cycle usage: for nearly half, putting together a legal route is 'often' difficult, and it's the case 'sometimes' for yet another two-fifths.

To follow a 'legal' route, cyclists in England and Wales must stick to bridleways and byways. While some landowners are happy for people to cycle on their footpaths, others treat it as civil trespass and they can and will challenge you; and, if you ride on a footpath covered by a no-cycling bylaw or traffic regulation order, it's a criminal offence. Some maintain (mistakenly, in our view), that even pushing a bike on a footpath isn't permissible.



You can ride to the right: it's a bridleway. You can't ride to the left: it's a footpath! Archaic designation on a common popular with cyclists.

Yet, for many non-technical cyclists and those carrying luggage, a good number of wide, solidly surfaced footpaths may prove easier to ride than, say, the rutted, boggy bridleways branching off them. And what about people with disabilities who don't use standard bikes? Some adapted machines exceed average dimensions and aren't rideable along narrow tracks, through tight gates, or on rough terrain, making off-road riding more of a challenge.

We must note here, though, that riders who want to exercise their technical skills and enjoy an adrenaline shot can despair of 'sanitisation' – they don't want every lump or bump in sight smoothed out. Instead, they like gravel, and slopes, and rocks and roots, and natural singletrack. It's important to cater for them too.

Yet, whatever the reason for anyone cycling off-road, the incoherence of much of the existing network is likely to trouble them all at some point.

You don't even have to get on your bike to grasp how illogical and peculiar rights of way can be. Look at a map, and you're bound to find paths morphing from bridleway to footpath simply because they've crossed the boundary into another county, or other jurisdiction. By historical quirk perhaps, two neighbouring councils came to different conclusions about the official status of the very same route.

Where are we?

But these aren't the only problems. Respondents to our Rides of Way survey also complained of poor signage and dire maps. None of us, after all, wants to lose our way when we're beyond the Green Belt, let alone not even find the place to begin with.

Narrow appeals

All the above difficulties, no doubt, go some way to explain why off-road cycling has such a narrow appeal in terms of diversity. Most enthusiasts seem to identify themselves as 'white British' and male, a fact that glared us straight in the face from our Rides of Way survey – 92% and 87% ticked these boxes respectively.

Clearly, we need to encourage a more representative range of people to sample the rural outdoors and become devotees of cycling or other active pastimes there.



Karen's challenge – Cadair Idris on a handcycle. Awesome.



Mum, where to next?

Admin nightmares and time pressures

We've already mentioned the difficulties that cyclists face on English rights of way. They're not alone. Local authorities can face difficulties with the system too.

Administratively speaking, sorting out anomalies or altering the official status of any section - upgrading a footpath upon request maybe, or even deciding whether a path on the ground is, in fact, a right of way of some kind - is an arduous and costly process for any council's Rights of Way Department, and it's all done piecemeal. And the worrying thing is that any path not recorded on a local authority's definitive map by 1 January 2026 will in effect be officially lost to the public, by law.

Sam's case study: fragments of a town to country cycle trip

To look at the map, cycling from the town where I work to my home village in the countryside shouldn't be too difficult. It's a straightforward journey along the road, but entirely unappealing due to both the speed and density of motor traffic.

Fortunately, there are alternative, cycle-friendlier routes, but each require compromise and whether I use them or not depends on the season.

The first obstacle is a huge bridge crossing two very busy A roads. The railings are 13cm too short, so cycling is currently banned for safety reasons – despite there being no recorded incidents in the past 30 years.

Following the canal into the town centre helps to avoid motor traffic, but the lack of lighting and frequently muddy surface means it's not a suitable route for all bikes and users, and you need good lights in winter.



Sam's stairs of despair!

Heading out of town, the route most people take is part of the National Cycle Network (NCN). To get onto it legally, I have to use a pedestrian crossing, cycle along a 1/2 mile stretch of an A road, come off at another traffic light and then wait (ages sometimes) for a toucan crossing to let me back onto the other side of the road again. Alternatively, I can avoid the road and cycle legitimately through a small park by the canal. This is OK, but the path is fairly narrow and popular with dog-walkers, and ends with some very steep concrete steps.

From there, it's plain-sailing along a shared use path but, disappointingly, the surface is prone to flooding after prolonged rain and there's another steep set of steps added to the mix! The lack of lighting and rough muddy surface at the top is off-putting for all but the most determined, as is the fast-ish rocky descent on the return journey. Consequently, I tend to avoid this route in winter months.

Ending up in a midway village, to keep on the right side of the law I have to cross a busy road not once but twice to keep on the NCN, which joins a shared use narrow tarmac path leading to the beginning of a route along a disused railway line.

In summer, this link is an ideal motor traffic-free route; in winter, large patches turn to muddy puddles that are treacherous below freezing and, again it's all unlit.

Despite the multiple obstacles, compared to joining the motor traffic, it's a dream, but you have to be committed to cycling to use it regularly and for anything but the occasional leisure ride – preferably in the summer when it's dry and sunny. Also, I've had to cobble it all together myself over time, and I remember it being very confusing at first. I've also had to adapt it to the seasons ever since.

It would be easier to use if:

- The links between the various sections were smoother and more obvious – it wouldn't be impossible to improve the road crossing points, or even introduce schemes to avoid the need to cross at all;
- The off-road paths were better maintained;
- If the steps were circumvented, or ironed out entirely!

Our local campaign group has proposed a 'greenway' that would create a much better linked motor traffic-free route. If that gets the go-ahead, it'll make a huge difference to me, other commuters and anyone wanting to take a leisure-time ride from town to our rural villages.

3. Our vision

Cycling UK wants cycling to be a safe and convenient activity in rural areas, seen as a natural means of recreation, enjoyment and travel. This is important not just for those venturing into the countryside and looking to cycle off-road; it's also vital for those who live there so they can access schools, railway stations and neighbouring villages on foot and by bike, without having to use the busiest roads.

Rather than being despondent about the challenges we've covered above, Cycling UK is looking to identify the solutions. It's entirely possible for conditions on many rural roads to be made more welcoming and safer for cyclists, walkers and horse riders, so that they can connect more easily with the off-road routes they enjoy and cherish. All this needs is the vision and the will.

Rural cycling: top ten essentials

- Ground-breaking legislation
- Good on-road to off-road connections
- Coherent rights of way network
- Collaboration between highway, rights of way and planning departments
- Quietened minor roads
- Incentives for landowners to welcome cycling on their land
- Protection for disused railways as cycle paths
- Footpath upgrades on National Trails
- Open welcome from National Parks
- Waymarked, circular loops for novices and families, and good maps

Visionary legislation

The good news is that, in recent years, Cycling UK has witnessed and been involved in major advances in Wales and Scotland. Not only have these nations recognised in principle the benefits of making it easier for people to cycle and walk in rural areas, but their governments have also used their powers to introduce daring, progressive legislation to facilitate it.

Trails for Wales

When the Welsh Government consulted on ideas for improving outdoor access for responsible recreation in 2015, Cycling UK, together with OpenMTB, launched Trails for Wales to embed cycling into its thinking.

Trails for Wales is an ongoing, phased campaign and through it we've helped the public engage with the Government as it develops its plans. As a result, the first consultation attracted a record-breaking number of responses and, unignorably, over 70% of these related to off-road cycling. Support has grown ever since, and our campaign now boasts more than 8,000 backers.

If the Welsh Government's proposals go ahead, the legal definitions of Welsh rights of way could be changed to allow people to cycle on suitable footpaths, thus opening up over 14,000 miles of motor traffic-free cycle routes and eradicating the kind of confusion and frustration we've already mentioned.



Trails for Wales – for future generations.

The footpath question

We accept, of course, that not every footpath is suitable for cycling, and we're happy for this to be addressed in any changes to access legislation. But it simply doesn't make sense to preserve the network in the exact same quirky, archaic and incoherent form it is now. In any case, things must surely change if we're serious about making rural Wales, and by that same token, rural England, more inviting for outdoor leisure for everyone, however they choose to travel.



Family fun in the forest.



Fat bikes and thin bikes in Wales, but always Cycling UK.

Currently, cyclists are legally entitled to ride on only about a fifth of the rights of way network. Opening more paths to them is likely to reduce congestion along certain routes or locations, minimising conflict between different users. After all, cyclists typically have a wider reach than walkers and, with more options on offer, their choices won't be nearly so restricted.

To help encourage considerate behaviour, Cycling UK has been working with representatives of our fellow non-motorised off-roaders - the British Horse Society and the Ramblers, for instance - to harmonise our vision and develop a code for sharing paths responsibly.

Outdoor Access Wales

Cycling UK and OpenMTB are not the only organisations keen to see more people enjoying their leisure time in the magnificent Welsh countryside, and unity is crucial. This is why we've formed the Outdoor Access Wales alliance, a body representing a wide variety of other outdoor activities such as horse riding, walking, climbing and canoeing. www.outdooraccesswales.org

Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013

Another excellent and related initiative from the Welsh Government is the Active Travel Act. Covering both urban and rural areas and not confined to rights of way, its emphasis is on integration. If implemented properly, this should help create truly coherent and comprehensive networks, making it easier for people to travel actively within and from urban areas, and into the countryside.

Essentially, the Act has made it a legal duty for local authorities to map their existing networks for cycling and walking and, also by means of maps, draft out their long-term plans for improving and enhancing them. All improvements must meet the Act's rigorous and exemplary national design standards.

Both sets of maps have now been submitted to the Government for scrutiny, but success on the ground depends on their quality and, crucially, finding the money to implement the improvements.

Sadly, limited funding is often a classic obstacle for any active travel vision, however grand, and the same is true of this Act. While some central funding has been allocated to specific schemes, Welsh authorities will undoubtedly need more. Without adequate investment, they might find themselves tinkering with their networks, rather than making any meaningful advances.



It's Wales, but there's more bikes than sheep!

Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003

In Scotland, cycling off-road for recreational purposes or making a journey across land has a clear legal status, thanks to the Land Reform or 'Right to Roam' Act. This ground-breaking legislation grants the public lawful access to most land and inland water, without distinguishing between walking, cycling and horse riding.

While it allows anyone exercising their rights to decide for themselves if they're behaving responsibly in the circumstances, it does expect them to abide by the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, which includes guidelines specific to cyclists.

The Act also made it a legal duty for every access authority to draw up a plan for 'core paths', to give local people and visitors reasonable access through the area for both recreational and everyday journeys. There is no legal requirement to implement core path plans but, once adopted, the paths do have legal status. Again, such paths can be, and many are, key components for a smooth and viable urban + rural network for walkers and cyclists.

England

While Scotland has revolutionised public access, and Wales is in the process of revamping it, England is still lumbering under largely archaic legislation (much of which is shared with Wales, interestingly enough).

However, Wales and Scotland are both strong examples of change for the better. They show what can be done with political will, and are a valuable inspiration for England to develop a modernised system of its own.



You take the high road and I'll take the low road.

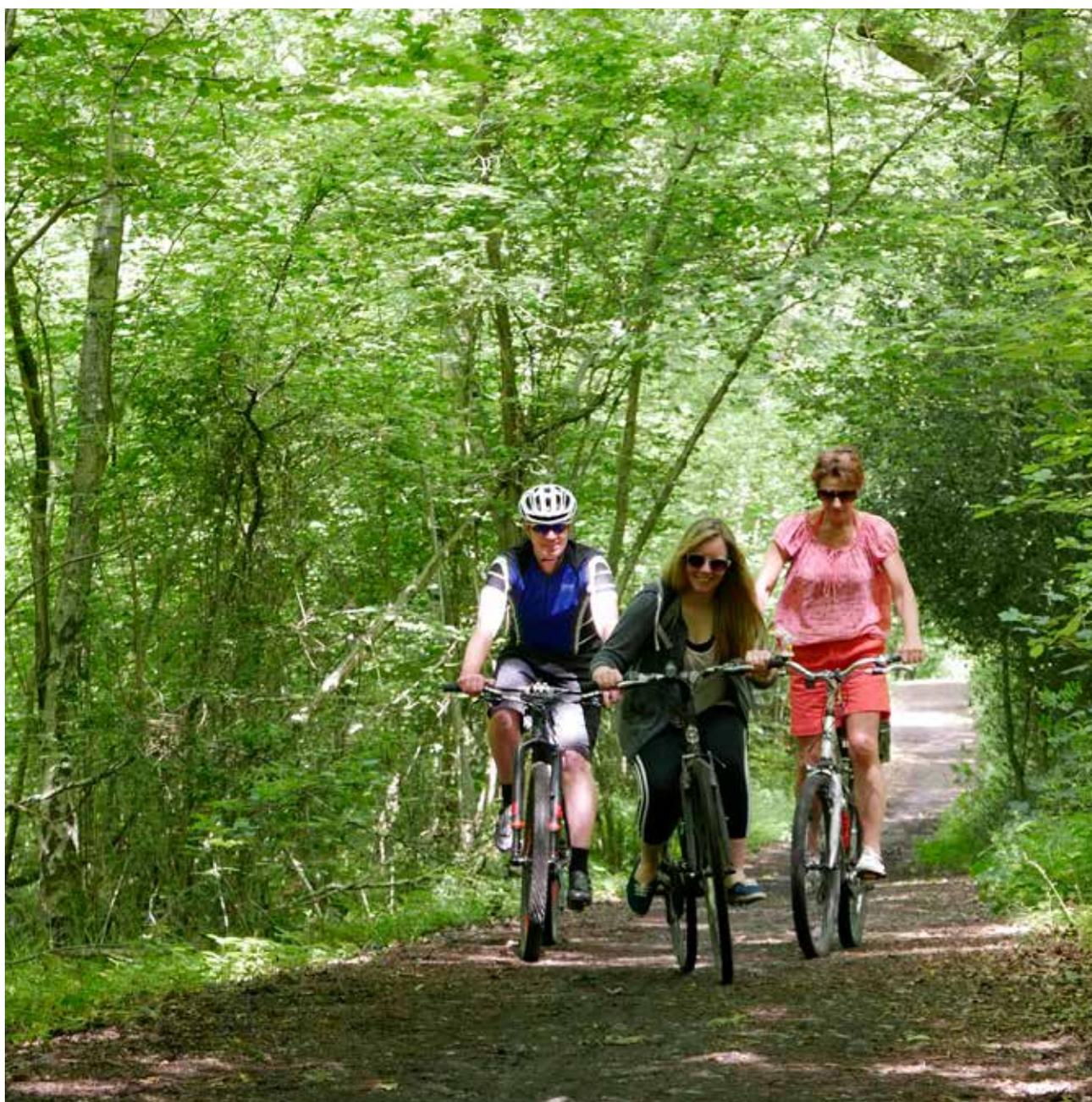
The Surrey Hills

Over the past two years, Cycling UK has been working closely with the Surrey Hills AONB to maximise its provision for cyclists.

Off-road, we have developed a series of waymarked bridleway and byway cycle routes, capitalising on the best-connected, motor traffic-free trails. The idea is to draw people into the less visited areas of the county, emphasising the remarkable views and extensive wild spaces hidden so close to London's urban sprawl.

When complete, the first phase of this project will connect the three main countryside sites with an almost entirely off-road, 45-mile loop. In partnership with the county council, National Trust, Ministry of Defence and Natural England, another five integrated loops will create a fully connected off-road network that everyone can access.

Future phases will expand this further across the county, integrating with existing urban fringe cycle infrastructure and National Trails.



A dreamy day on the Downs Link.

Dreaming of a better network: mechanisms

Within and by means of the current system - and hopefully reforms will happen in time – English local authorities highways and rights of way departments do have mechanisms at their command to improve their networks and, in the Green Belt context, to enhance connectivity between settlements and off-road routes. Also, their planning departments and landowners have the potential to make a positive contribution too.

Rights of Way Improvement Plans (RoWIPs)

RoWIPs were introduced by the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW), and all English and Welsh local authorities (apart from inner London authorities) had to produce one.

In them, authorities were expected to state how they proposed to manage their local rights of way and secure improvements. This had to be based on an assessment to include, amongst other things, the opportunities provided by local rights of way (and in particular by footpaths, cycle tracks, bridleways and restricted byways) for exercise and other forms of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of their area.

The downside is that RoWIPs do not have to be implemented. They must, however, be reviewed after 10 years, a process that is happening now in many cases.



Bikes by the bench and family bonding.

Given that the review has to be based on a new assessment, this is an excellent opportunity for a fresh check-up on the network's suitability for cycling; to be imaginative about new trails on, for example, Forestry Commission land, disused railways, or along the Canal and River Trust's waterways; and to remedy gaps and missing links.

Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs)

Local authorities in England outside London are being encouraged by the Government to produce an LCWIP to help them "take a more strategic approach to improving conditions for cycling and walking in order to support increases in travel on foot and by cycling."

A component of the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy published by the Department for Transport (DfT) in 2017, LCWIPs involve:

- Planning comprehensive cycling and walking networks for their areas;
- Identifying and prioritising a costed programme of schemes to progressively develop that network; and
- Delivering it to high design standards.

The plans are not compulsory, but the Government has issued robust technical guidance to support their production.

RoWIPs + LCWIPs

In England, the ongoing RoWIP process and the advent of LCWIPs is the perfect chance to identify not only the snags and disconnections within the off-road and on-road networks, but also the snags and disconnections between them.

In Wales, moves to combine plans focusing on active travel with those focusing on rights of way are, in fact, already under discussion. Potentially, this is network planning at its most genuine, efficient and effective.

Evidently, English local authorities dealing with both RoWIPs and LCWIPs can only exploit this happy coincidence if the officers tasked with each plan - most likely rights of way and highways officers - don't work in departmental cells, as they've been historically inclined to do. With collaboration, schemes feeding walkers and cyclists safely and conveniently onto off-road routes via quiet/quietened 'first mile' on-road routes (not forgetting exit routes from rail stations), for instance, could blossom as a result.

Speed limits and traffic calming

Rural speed limits are often anachronistic, with many B, C and unclassified minor roads still subject to the national speed limit. This is the case even though many of them are narrow, bendy and visibility is poor.

The answer here, of course, is to reduce the limits in question. Also, traffic calming on some of the minor roads that run parallel to busy major carriageways may be a quicker, more cost-effective (and enjoyable) solution than building segregated infrastructure along the major road itself.

In the New Forest, for example, reducing the speed limit on minor roads to 40mph in the 1990s has seen a huge drop in the number of animals killed in collision with motor vehicles, and it's made this rural area far more inviting for cyclists, walkers and horse riders to visit.

Planning departments

With pressure growing on housing, most councils' planning departments are busy handling applications for new developments. However extensive these developments are, the planning process is always a good opportunity to create or improve cycling and walking connections in the neighbourhood, both to the nearby countryside and between towns and villages.

Grants and subsidies for landowners

Some landowners are happy for sections of their land to be used to help plug gaps in the off-road network, or enhance it in other ways. Drawing more of them into the network planning process would be an added bonus and, to make this more attractive, we strongly advocate the introduction of incentives in the form of government grants and subsidies.

Cycling UK thinks that it is timely to lobby for this now: in its new 25-year plan for a 'Green Future' (2018, England), the Government states that one of its aspirations is to connect more people with the natural environment, whilst acknowledging that how we invest in it will inevitably change once the UK leaves the EU.

Dreaming of a better network: old railways, National Trails & Parks, and themed loops

Old railways

Although thousands of disused railway lines have been bulldozed and built over, some could still be regenerated as first-class cycle paths. A number of them, in fact, have been converted, but some already earmarked have been waiting for years for funding to surface them and carry out ancillary work.

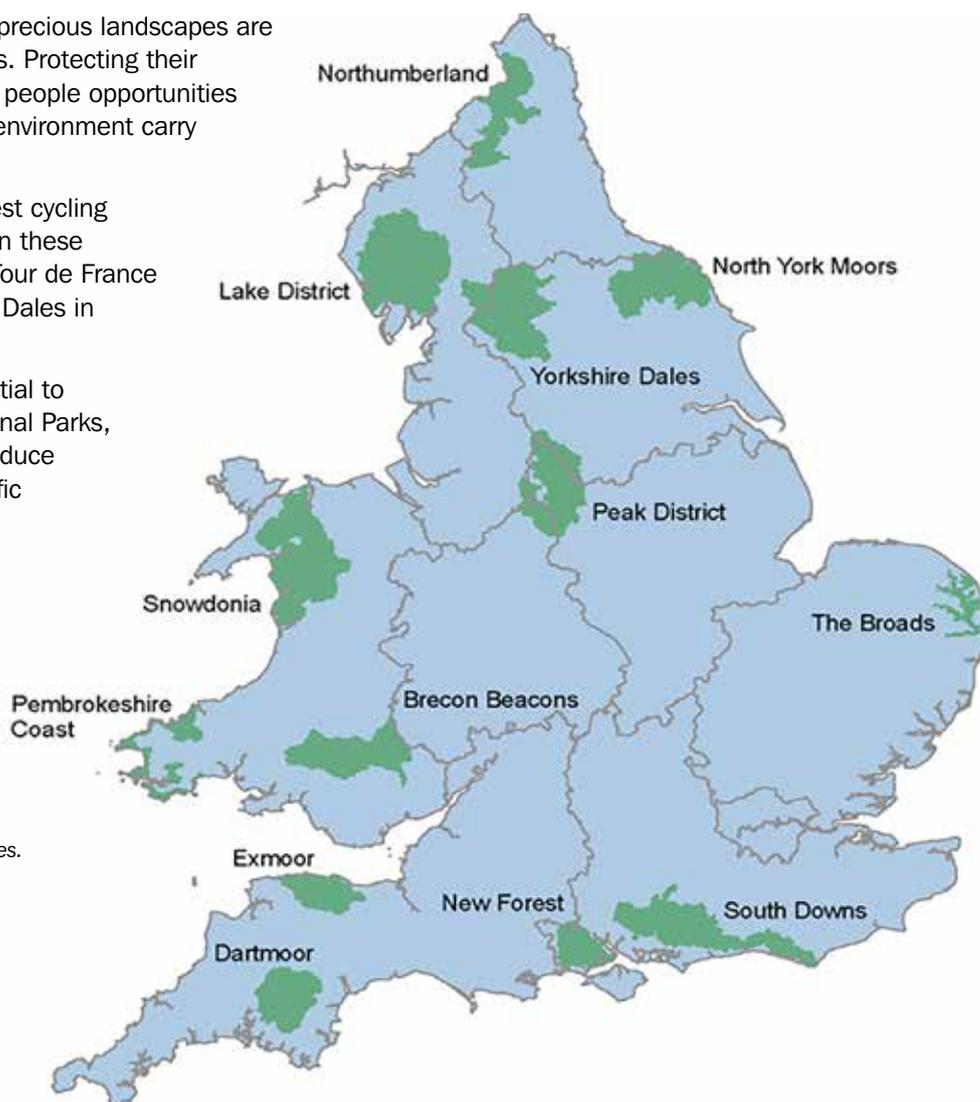
To help protect these routes, Cycling UK wants to see them secured and opened to the public as expeditiously as possible, even if the resources to perfect them are likely to take same time to follow.

National Parks

Many of the country's most precious landscapes are designated as National Parks. Protecting their special qualities while giving people opportunities to connect with the natural environment carry equal importance.

Already, some of Britain's best cycling experiences take place within these parks: the spectacle of the Tour de France racing through the Yorkshire Dales in 2014, for instance.

There's still enormous potential to promote cycling within National Parks, both for recreation and to reduce the impact of motorised traffic on local communities.



National Parks in England and Wales. Which one is nearest to you?

National Trails

Only two of the fifteen National Trails in England and Wales are fully open to cyclists and horse riders. On the others, extensive stretches of bridleway are punctuated with sections of footpath.

Powers do exist to upgrade the footpath sections so that riders don't have to dismount every so often, and Cycling UK urges the relevant authorities to use them, backed up with the necessary resources.



Two little boys had two little bikes.

Themed loops

For some, simply walking or cycling freely in the countryside is entertainment enough. Others may need more of a staged, facilitated experience at a trail centre or bike park, say.

A family's cycling day out could be all the more fun on a circular, waymarked route themed with a story, or some obvious historical or botanical landmarks to investigate on the way. It's the overall experience that matters.



Touring on and off-road, you'll need your We Are Cycling UK cap!

4. Making it happen

So, that's our vision for what we want cycling in the countryside to look and feel like, but having the vision is just the first step. We now need to make it happen.

To do this, Cycling UK will be working tirelessly to influence national governments, major landowners, local authorities and other stakeholders to bring about this change.

We'll also be publishing a toolkit for local campaigners, to make it easier for others to support our efforts locally, because we need as much help as we can get to turn the vision into reality. If you come and join us on this journey, we're sure you'll enjoy the ride.

Fact	Source
The vast majority of respondents to Cycling UK's Rides of Way Survey - 90% - said that off-road cycling is either 'very' or 'fairly' important to their physical health.	Cycling UK: Rides of Way 2017
Over 91% of our Rides of Way respondents told us that off-road cycling is 'very' or 'fairly' important for their mental health and wellbeing.	Cycling UK: Rides of Way 2017
Cycle tourism brings in an estimated total of £500 million to Scotland.	The Value of Cycling to the Scottish Economy. Report for Cycling Scotland by Transform Scotland. 2018.
In 2016 ...	
The proportion of cyclists usually cycling off the road in parks, open country or private land has increased over the last ten years, from 19% in 2006 to 24% (+26%). (England).	DfT: National Travel Survey 2016 (2017) Table NTS0315
More adults cycled for leisure once a week than for transport: 8% leisure; 6% transport. (England).	DfT: Walking and Cycling Statistics, England, 2016 (2017)
Urban roads carried more cycle traffic than rural roads: 3.5% rural A roads (0.12 billion vehicle miles (BVM)); 28.7% rural minor roads (0.99 BVM); 14.5% on urban A roads (0.5 BVM); 53.3% minor urban roads (1.84 BVM). (Great Britain).	DfT: Road Traffic Estimates GB, 2016 (2017) Table TRA0402
Although rural A roads carried only 3.5% of cycle traffic, 28% of cyclist fatalities happened on them; and 11% of reported cyclist serious injuries.	DfT: Reported Road Casualties GB 2016 (2017) Table RAS30018

Do you share our vision and want to help?

If you share our vision for cycling beyond the Green Belt, you can help us achieve it by joining our network of campaigners both on and off-road in rural areas, whatever time you have to spare. To find out more, please email campaigns@cyclinguk.org

Further reading

Rides of Way: Cycling UK's Off-road Report 2017

www.cyclinguk.org/press-release/2017-02-15/first-road-cycling-report-gives-unique-insight-uk-scene

Peak District cycle tourism toolkit: discover how to attract the cycling market and benefit your business. Pedal Peak for Business 2017. **www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/visiting/cycle/pedalpeak**



Time for a rest to enjoy the view.



Find us on:  Facebook and  Twitter

Support Cycling UK | T: 0844 736 8451 or 01483 238301

www.cyclinguk.org

Cycling UK | Parklands | Railton Road | Guildford | Surrey | GU2 9JX