

## **13. Green corridors**

### **Definition**

- 13.1 This typology includes towpaths along canals and riverbanks, cycleways, rights of way and disused railway lines. Green corridors are linear routes with a primary purpose of providing opportunities for walking, cycling and horse riding, whether for leisure purposes or travel. Green corridors also facilitate wildlife migration.
- 13.2 In addition to providing recreational routes in their own right, green corridors play an important role in linking open spaces together, providing a green infrastructure network across the city. Green corridors are an important resource linking the urban areas with accessible countryside.
- 13.3 Green corridors can be particularly valuable in cities, creating links between open spaces and local residents. Green corridors also provide valuable linkages between the City and outlying settlements. As highlighted throughout this report, in many instances enhancing links between open spaces will be as important as the development of new sites.

### **Green corridor**



- 13.4 In addition to improving sustainability and linking urban areas with nearby rural countryside, green corridors represent an important chance to promote sustainable transport by cycle and on foot. Provision and use of green corridors will be a key determinant in the achievement of targets for participation in sport and active recreation.
- 13.5 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”*
- 13.6 It is therefore important to address any deficiencies of green corridors and capitalise on opportunities to increase and enhance the network. Providing a high quality infrastructure will not only increase use of green corridors, but linkages between sites will increase usage of individual open space sites and reduce barriers to access.

### **Local context**

- 13.7 The dense urban nature of the City of Manchester means that there are relatively few public rights of way. Manchester is one of only a few authorities in the country to have a Rights of Way (ROW) network less than 100km in length (78km). However, despite this the Council is committed to the protection and development of public rights of way.
- 13.8 Manchester City Council is responsible for the maintenance of the public rights of way and bridleways within the City boundary and the updating of public rights of way and bridleway maps.
- 13.9 Manchester City Council has developed a draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). The aim of the plan is to develop a functional network which meets the needs of current and future users and supports the development of sustainable communities.
- 13.10 A key theme of the ROWIP is to improve and create links to open spaces in Manchester.
- 13.11 The entire ROW network was surveyed in 2006 and it was found that 67% of the network was considered 'easy to use'. Research and consultation identified that the following factors could improve the ROW network in Manchester:
- improve path surfaces and maintenance
  - improved information on the location of walking and cycling routes
  - more short circular routes
  - safer routes to school, work and transport interchanges.
- 13.12 A survey to residents in 2005 regarding improvements to the ROW network found that:
- 75% of respondents used off road routes, with walking being the most popular activity
  - the majority of respondents use paths because they are close to home
  - nearly half of the respondents felt that the condition of paths was good
  - reasons for not using paths were: unsafe, litter, dog fouling and a lack of information
  - the highest priority identified by residents was keeping paths clean and 40% of respondents identified nature conservation as a high priority.
- 13.13 The Manchester Disabled People's Access Group identified surface improvements, keeping paths clean, creating new walking paths and safer crossing routes and nature conservation as high priorities.

13.14 The outcomes of the ROWIP are to:

- establish safer routes
- improve path surfaces and maintenance
- keep paths clean
- create routes accessible to people with limited mobility and impairments
- create routes linking to varying services in the City, therefore encouraging walking and cycling
- provide safe crossing points
- create links to recreational sites and leisure routes, particularly open spaces
- create more short circular routes
- encourage nature conservation and partnership working
- provide better information on the ROW network.

13.15 Manchester City Council's commitment to the provision of green corridors is further emphasised in a number of local documents. The key themes emerging from these documents are:

- the **Manchester Unitary Development Plan** identifies creating a network of safe and attractive major linear recreational open spaces by linking and making better use of river valleys, canals, disused railways and other areas of open space as a priority for environmental improvement
- the **Manchester Tree Strategy** prioritises tree planting to create wildlife corridors
- the **Manchester Waterways Strategy** highlights the value and opportunities Manchester's rivers, tributaries and canals provide
- a key objective of the **Local Transport Plan 2** is to encourage and facilitate walking and cycling in the City.

13.16 The key themes outlined in the documents above highlight the role that green corridors can play in increasing forms of sustainable transport, improving quality of life, improving the health and levels of physical activity of residents in the City and increasing access to public spaces. The provision of a high quality 'green network' will be essential in the delivery of these objectives.

### **Consultation**

13.17 Consultation on the existing network of green corridors in Manchester demonstrated that:

- green corridors are regularly used by residents. 29% of respondents to the household survey use this type of open space at least once a week. The importance of green corridors was further emphasised at drop in sessions, with residents highlighting this type of open space as highly valuable and well used
- the majority of respondents to the household survey indicate that there is not enough green corridors (44%). 24% of residents consider the provision of this type of open space to be about right
- reasons given by residents for identifying the provision of green corridors as insufficient were that many green corridors have been lost to development or become isolated due to development
- 39% of respondents to the household survey consider the quality of green corridors to be average. Around a third (32%) of residents feel that the quality of green corridors is either poor or very poor and 29% of residents feel that the quality of this type of open space is either good or very good. This indicates that the quality of green corridors in the City is varied
- within the City Centre, green corridors were considered to be poor quality, largely due to a lack of maintenance. It was highlighted that this type of open space can be particularly important in the City Centre where there is a lack of more formal open space
- the 'Fallowfield Loop' and cycle ways from Longsight to Newton Heath were identified as bring under used and poorly maintained
- a lack of awareness of the location of green corridors was evident. It was indicated that if awareness was improved, green corridors would experience increase usage.

### **Current position**

#### ***Quality***

13.18 While it is inappropriate to measure the area of green corridors, quality is central to their use and value both as a recreational resource and also as a means of enhancing wildlife.

13.19 A quality vision based on the aspirations of the local community of Manchester has therefore been set below. Full justifications for the recommended local standards are provided within Appendix G. It can be seen that cleanliness is the top priority for local residents, reinforcing the importance of careful maintenance and management.

**Quality Standard (see Appendix G)**

<b>Recommended standard – Green corridors</b>		
Local consultation, national guidance and best practice suggest that the following features are essential and desirable to local residents:		
<b>Essential</b>	<b>Desirable</b>	
Clean/Litter Free	Litter Bins	
Footpaths	Level Surface	
Nature Features	Flowers/Trees	
Detailed analysis of the local consultation suggests that with regards to green corridors, the relative importance of the key components is as follows:		
<b>Component of quality</b>	<b>Proportion of possible total responses received</b>	<b>Weighting</b>
Security and Safety	<b>17%</b>	<b>1</b>
Cleanliness and maintenance	<b>26%</b>	<b>2</b>
Vegetation	<b>52%</b>	<b>4</b>
Ancillary accommodation	<b>29%</b>	<b>3</b>

**Quantity standard**

13.20 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 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”.*

13.21 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”.*

13.22 Although green corridors have not been audited as part of this study, they do form part of a wider network of open spaces. Green corridors will be particularly important in some areas of the City and opening up access to these biodiverse open spaces will be a priority in some areas of Manchester.

**Accessibility standard**

13.23 There is no requirement to set catchments for green corridors as they cannot be easily influenced through planning policy and implementation.

**Applying provision standards**

13.24 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 based on standards.

13.25 As suggested by PPG17, planning policy should aim to facilitate the delivery of an integrated network of high quality green corridors linking open spaces together and opportunities for informal recreation and alternative means of transport. Consideration should also be given to the provision of effective wildlife corridors, enabling the migration of species across the City.

**GC1**

In consideration of the key role green corridors can play in achieving wider council objectives and the popularity of this typology with residents, planning policy should seek to promote the development of green linkages. This includes encouraging the provision of green links in new housing developments and areas of regeneration as well as proactive action to enhance and develop pathways along the rivers and disused railway lines. The LDF should facilitate the protection of existing corridors as well as the development of new sites. It may be that a policy is included within the LDF which ensures that where on site provision of open space is not appropriate, financial contributions may be used to deliver part of the green infrastructure network.

13.26 The Local Transport Plan encourages cycling and walking in the City and seeks to increase sustainable access to public spaces. Green corridors can play a key role in achieving this vision. Any programme to improve green corridors should take into account the needs of a variety of users including those on foot, bike and on horse back.

**GC2**

The council should work in tandem with key partners to help maximise the use of green corridors and public rights of way in the City. This will provide opportunities for informal recreation and alternative means of transport, using all types of open spaces.

13.27 In addition to delivering an overall joined up network, improvements to the quality of existing corridors will be essential if current usage is to be maintained and increased. This may include improved signage, improved safety and enhanced maintenance of paths. The maintenance of green corridors and the importance of cleanliness were key issues raised during local consultation and in the ROWIP.

13.28 The role of green corridors in the promotion of biodiversity and nature conservation is also evident from the ROWIP. As well as offering recreational opportunities, green corridors act as wildlife corridors enabling the migration of species and are important habitats. They are a key component of the green infrastructure. Qualitative improvements should therefore consider environmental issues as well as recreational needs.

<b>GC3</b>	Drive a programme of qualitative improvements across the City including enhanced maintenance of footpaths and increased signage. Management of green corridors should also give rise to consideration of their role as wildlife corridors and habitats.
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- 13.29 As highlighted in the ROWIP, improving the quality of life of residents through the provision of a high quality sustainable transport network is a key objective. The appropriate provision of green corridors and promotion of the opportunities available will have a positive influence on the drive to reduce health inequalities. Enhancing access to green corridors will therefore emphasise the role that outdoor recreation can play in delivering a number of economic and sustainable health objectives.

<b>GC4</b>	Promote the opportunities available to increase usage of green corridors. As well as increasing awareness, partnership working with the PCT and other key organisations to deliver organised opportunities should be considered. Green corridors should link neighbourhoods with community facilities and different open spaces.
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<b>GC5</b>	Investigate the feasibility of a green infrastructure study to help maximise the linkages of open spaces with green corridors and help create a network of multi-functional greenspace in Manchester. This should serve as an extension to this PPG17 Study and should link with adjoining authorities.
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### Summary

- 13.30 Green corridors provide opportunities close to peoples' homes for informal recreation, particularly walking and cycling, as part of every day activities, for example, travelling to work or the shops. Therefore the development of a linked green corridor network will help to improve the health and well being of the local community and encourage the use of sustainable forms of transport. In this way, green corridors can be integral to the achievement of targets for increased active recreation and improved quality of life.
- 13.31 As an urban area, the quantity of footpaths and Public Rights of Way is limited. Despite this, consultation indicates that they are well used. Planning policies should facilitate the protection of existing green corridors and facilitate the delivery of new sites, particularly maximising the use of natural resources such as river banks. Revisions to the green corridor network should consider the needs and aspirations of all users.
- 13.32 A network of multi-functional greenspace will contribute to the high quality natural and built environment required for existing and new sustainable communities in the future. An integrated network of high quality green corridors will link open spaces, helping to alleviate other open space deficiencies and provide opportunities for sustainable means of transport.
- 13.33 Although green corridors have not been audited as part of this study, they do form part of a wider network of open spaces. Green corridors will be particularly important in some areas of the City and opening up access to these biodiverse open spaces will be a priority in some areas of Manchester.

13.34 The key priorities for the future delivery of green corridors should therefore include:

- work in tandem with key partners such to help maximise the use of green corridors and public rights of way in the City and to deliver the objectives of the Local Transport Plan
- facilitate the protection and development of the network through the inclusion of appropriate policies in the LDF – this may include permitting contributions towards the development of green linkages where appropriate provision cannot be developed on site
- drive a programme of qualitative improvements across the City. This should give consideration to both the recreational and conservation values of green corridors
- promote the opportunities available to increase usage of green corridors
- undertake a green infrastructure assessment in conjunction with adjoining local authorities, considering the balance between biodiversity and recreation.