

MALVERN HILLS DISTRICT COUNCIL OPEN SPACE, SPORT & RECREATION STUDY: ASSESSMENT REPORT

PART 6: GREEN CORRIDORS

Introduction

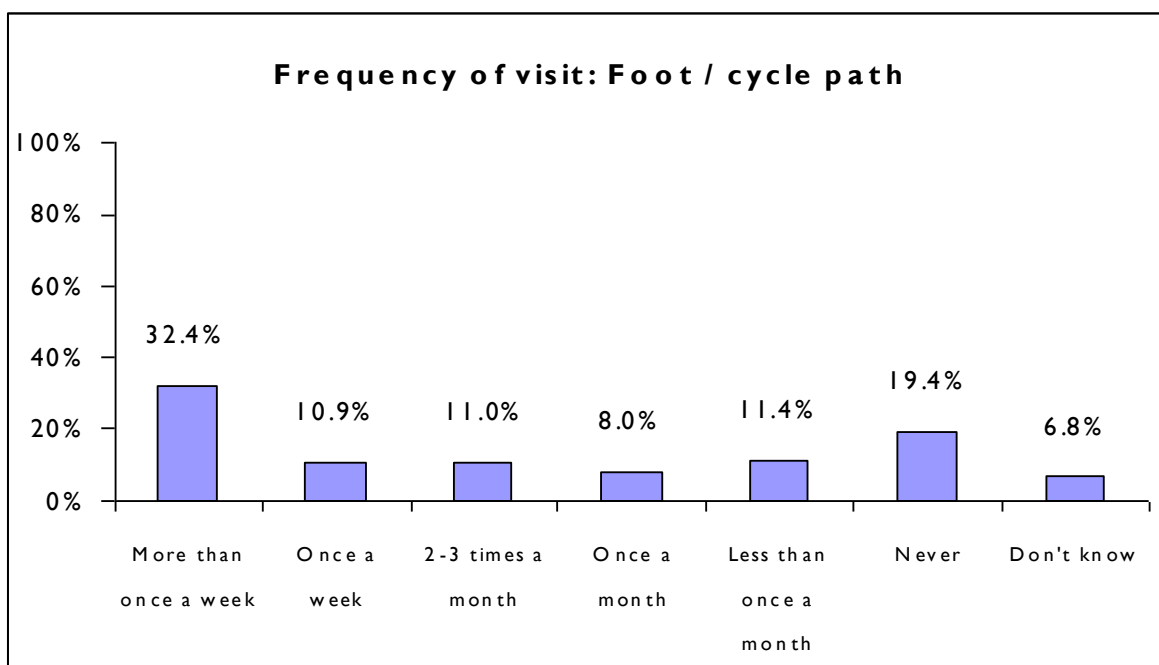
6.1 The typology of green corridors, as set out in PPG17: A Companion Guide includes sites that offer opportunities for 'walking, cycling or horse riding, whether for leisure purposes or travel and opportunities for wildlife migration'. This also includes river and canal banks, road and rail corridors, cycling routes within towns and cities, pedestrian paths within towns and cities, rights of way and permissive paths.

Context

6.2 This section outlines findings from the survey of residents in relation to their use of and attitudes towards the provision of green corridors in Malvern Hills District. It provides a context for the subsequent sections, which address the quantity, quality and accessibility of provision. Results are provided for the descriptions used in the survey itself.

Usage

Figure 6.1: Frequency of usage of footpaths/cyclepaths in the previous 12 months

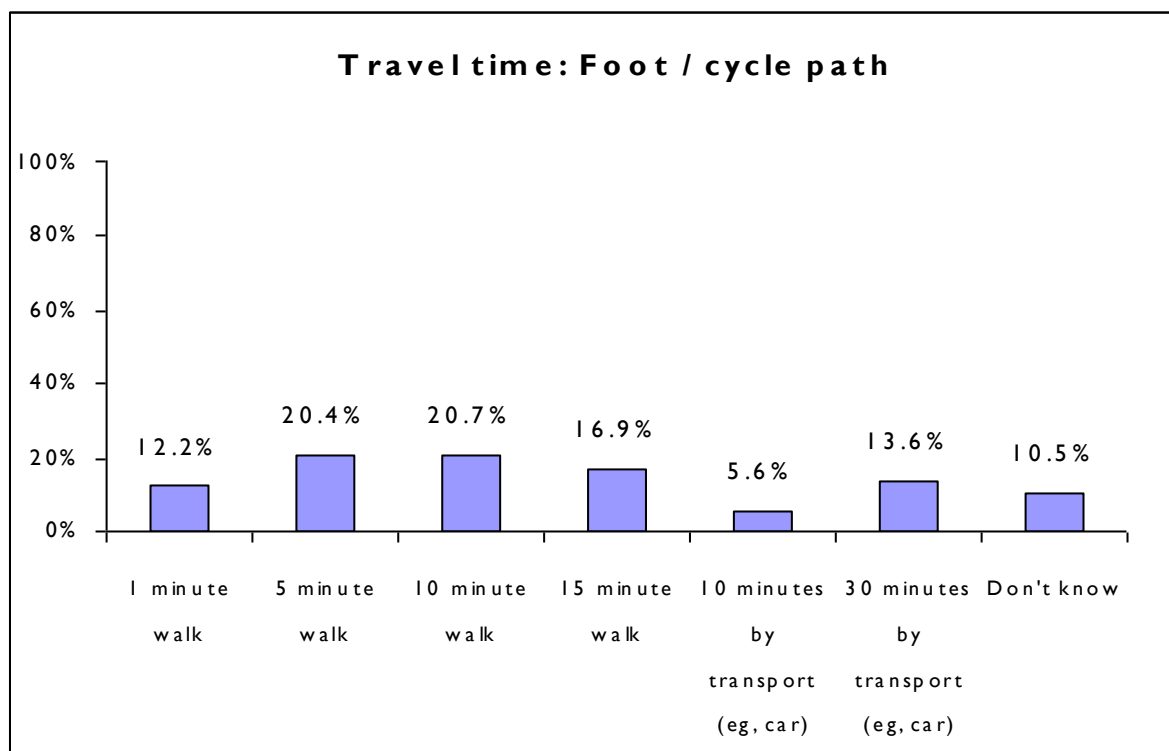


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6.3 Overall usage of foot/cycle paths is high, with almost three-quarters (73.7%) having used one in the previous 12 months. Frequency of usage is also strong, with over two-fifths (43.3%) using such provision once a week or more. This highlights the importance of maintaining high quality green corridor networks in the District – they are used by a large proportion of the population and they are also regularly used. There is some variation in usage or frequency by area. Usage declines by age from 75.4% amongst 25 – 34 year olds to 64.1% for the 65+.

Travel time

Figure 6.2: Time prepared to travel to reach a footpath/cyclepath



6.4 Reflecting the nature of their usage, nearly three quarters (70.2%) of residents would travel no further than a 15-minute walk. Only a small proportion (19.2%) is willing to travel up to 30 minutes via the use of transport.

Quality of provision

6.5 Nearly half (46.6%) of respondents rate the quality of foot/cycle paths in Malvern Hills District as good or very good. This is three times the proportion that rates provision as poor or very poor (15.7%). A sizeable proportion rates it as average (25.3%). Reflecting the strong level of usage, only 12.4% are unable to rate provision. There is no significant variation in the rating of quality by area. However, there is a drop off by age from 64.3% for 25 – 34 year olds to 43.8% for the 55 –



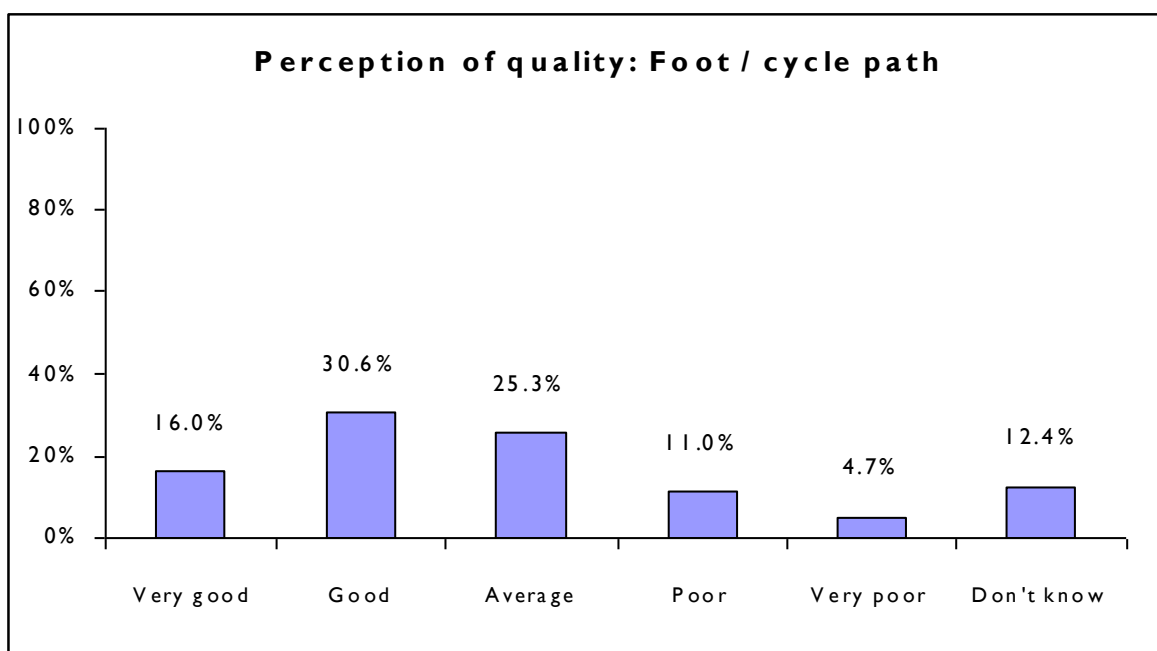
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64 age group. This reflects usage, with the proportion unable to rate provision increasing.

Availability

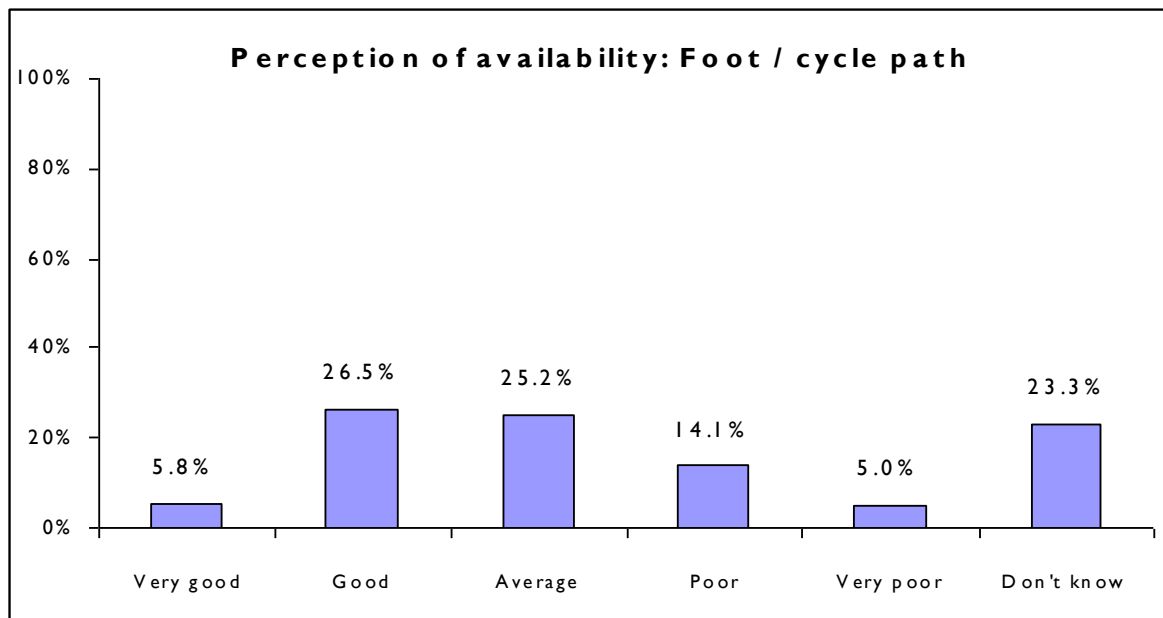
6.6 Nearly a third (32.3%) rate the availability of foot/cycle paths as good or very good in Malvern Hills District. A significant proportion rates it as poor or very poor (19.1%). Just over a quarter rate availability as average (25.2%) and a further quarter (23.3%) of residents are unable to comment on the availability of this typology. A similar pattern in that seen for quality emerges, as the fall off in usage as residents get older leads to an increase in the provision unable to rate availability. This, in turn, reduces the proportion rating the availability of foot/cycle paths as good or very good from 43.9% for 25 – 34 year olds to 32.2% in the 55 – 64 age group.

Figure 6.3: Quality of provision of footpath/cyclepath



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Figure 6.4: Availability of footpaths/cyclepaths



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Key issues

Current provision

- 6.7 In total there is 403¹ hectares of green corridor provision across Malvern Hills District. Public rights of way (PROW) - footpaths and bridleways - make up 376 hectares. The remaining 27 hectares consists of Malvern Common (Guarlford Road), Newland green corridor and Upton-upon-Severn waterfront path.

Table 6.1: Distribution of green corridors sites by analysis area

Analysis area	Green corridors/ PROW
	Size(ha)
Malvern Town area	54.89
Rural areas	298.71
Tenbury Town area	35.46
Upton and Hanley areas	14.09
MALVERN HILLS DISTRICT	403.16

Accessibility

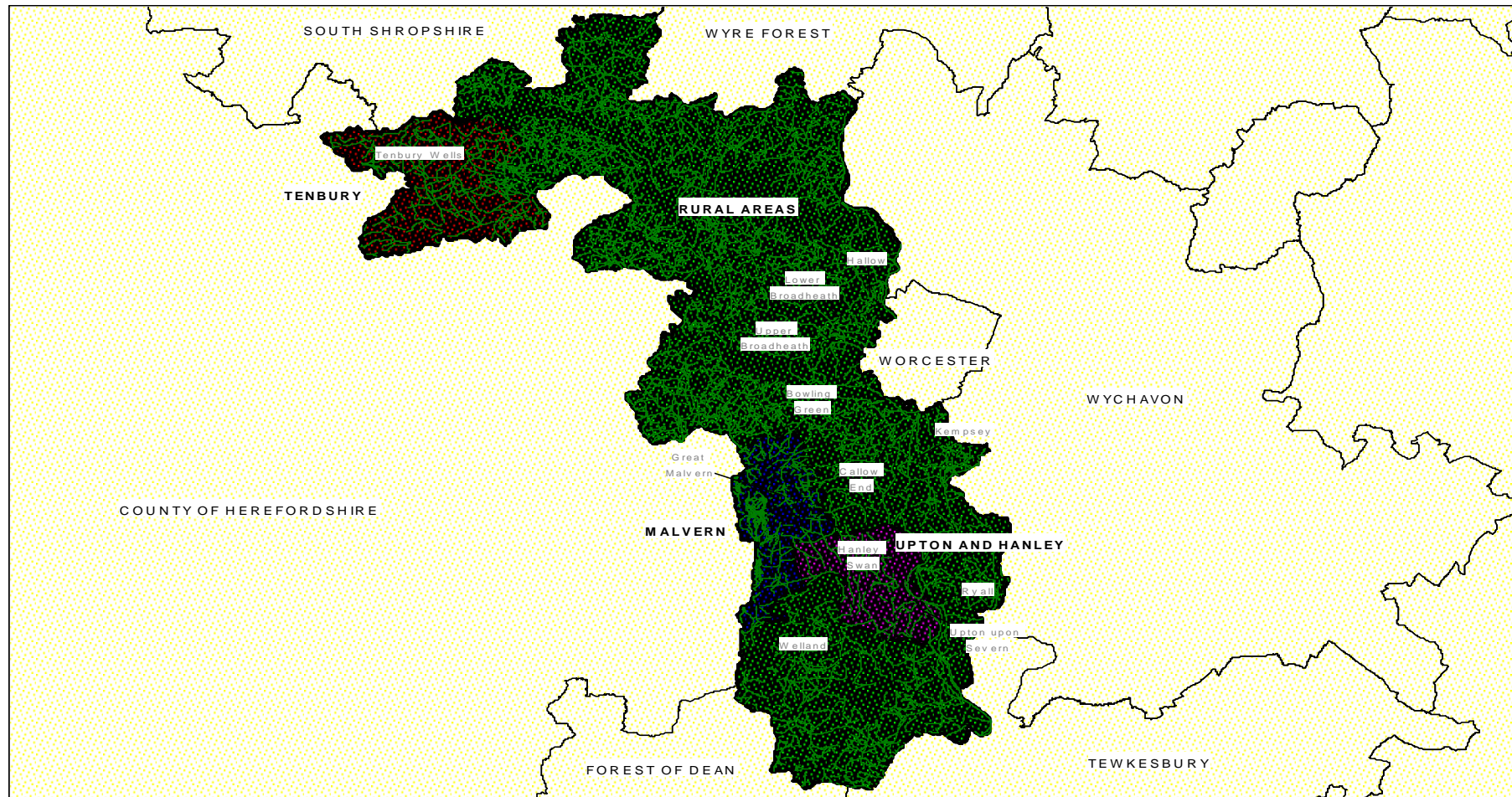
- 6.8 It is difficult to assess green corridors against catchment areas due to the very nature and usage of green corridors, often as access to other open spaces. The map below demonstrates the coverage of the existing provision within Malvern Hills District. A comprehensive picture of accessibility has been built up through the consultation.

¹ Figures rounded up



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Figure 6.5: Green corridors mapped against settlement areas



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- 6.9 There is a 1177 mile (376 ha) PROW network serving the Malvern Hills District consisting of footpaths (83%), bridleways (16%), byways and un-surfaced unclassified roads (UUCR) (1%). In addition there are 100 miles of footpaths and bridleways across the Hills themselves maintained by Malvern Hills Conservators.
- 6.10 User consultation identifies that the footpath network throughout Malvern Hills District is considered to be well connected and adequate in terms of quantity. However, provision of PROW with equestrian rights is considered to be lacking as is provision for off-road cycling.
- 6.11 PROW users consider the limited bridleway and off-road cycling network in the District to be fragmented, impeding usage. There is demand for the connectivity of the bridleway network to be improved through upgrade and re-designation of intersecting footpaths to bridleway status. Users express desire for priority to be given to those footpaths that, if upgraded to bridleway status, would create off-road circular horse riding and off-road cycling provision and linkages, for which there is identified demand. Horse riders in Upon-upon-Severn highlight that, in order to access bridleways, there is a need to travel by car and horsebox.
- 6.12 Bridleway users also report that major roads, such as the A449, act as barriers to access when they dissect bridleway routes. There is demand for a safe crossing place to be installed on the A449 between Malvern Wells and Malvern Hills AONB to facilitate easy access to the Hills using the bridleway running parallel to the B4209.
- 6.13 All users express demand for resurrection of old/disused railway lines. One opportunity identified through consultation in the disused railway line linking Malvern Town and Upton Town. Currently the disused line is not open for public access as much is in private ownership and a section is managed by WWT as a nature reserve with restricted access. However, the line does present a good opportunity for the provision of a multi-user route linking great Malvern Town and Upton Town and for creating off-road links to the Three Counties Showground and Upton Rugby Ground. The possibility of opening the line as a multi-user permissive route should be re-investigated by MHDC, in partnership with WCC and Sustrans. This will have to be a well managed process, with particular emphasis on landowner and user group involvement, in order to be successful.
- 6.14 Although there is interest and demand for carriage driving within the District, consultation identifies a lack of opportunities for the activity. Provision for carriage driving, which requires restricted by-ways, can increase access to the countryside. There is demand for this provision to be improved.
- 6.15 Where feasible, WCC is replacing stiles with gates to improve accessibility of the PROW network. This is also being undertaken by a number of parish councils throughout the District. To create a more accessible network consultation identifies potential for greater information provision regarding the different routes. Distances between starting and finishing destinations, number of stiles on a route,

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gradient and difficulty are examples of the different types of information that can be provided for key routes on the WCC and MHDC websites and within walking guides. This will ensure that all users, whatever their ability and local knowledge, can be aware about what to expect of a route to assess whether it is suitable for them to attempt.

- 6.16 The PROW on the Malvern Hills experience high usage due to the popularity of the Hills with both residents and visitors to the District. Consultation identifies the need to better integrate the PROW on the Hills with the surrounding countryside and AONB to encourage greater usage of the whole network, facilitate access to the countryside and reduce visitor pressure on the Hills. Local residents and PROW users would like to see greater promotion and awareness of the walking opportunities available in the countryside through improved signage and way-marking.
- 6.17 There is good promotion of the walking and cycling opportunities offered by the District through the provision of a number of leaflets produced and distributed by WCC, MHDC and Malvern Hills Conservators, amongst others.

Management

- 6.18 The Countryside Service within Worcestershire County Council (WCC) maintains the network of PROW in Worcestershire, including the 1177 miles of footpaths and bridleways within Malvern Hills District. Maintenance responsibilities of WCC include signposting paths where they leave a road, way marking paths, clearance of undergrowth and ensuring landowners comply with their responsibilities.
- 6.19 WCC is in the process of drafting a public right of way improvement plan (ROWIP) to help support the management and development of the PROW network for Worcestershire. Following consultation an outline strategy will be published giving direction for a detailed action and implementation plan. Key issues priorities in terms of aims and objectives are:
- To provide a rights of way network which meets the needs of the public.
 - To ensure that the rights of way network is easy to use.
 - To balance the different needs of users and others with an interest in the network.
 - To raise awareness of, promote and build confidence in the rights of way network.
 - To manage resources effectively.
- 6.20 Responsibility for the PROW on the Hills lies with the Malvern Hills Conservators. There are some management issues faced by the Conservators surrounding conflicting user interests. The main users of the Hills are walkers but the terrain and the lack of off-road cycling provision results in them also being popular with off-road cyclists. Consultation identifies that the growing use of the Hills for off-

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road biking is a growing concern amongst other users. However, consultation also identifies that the majority of cyclists on the Hills are considerate to other users and do not cause significant problems. Cyclists that use the Hills highlight concern that legal cycle paths (bridleways) terminate at the Ridgeway of the Hills, which is the local authority boundary. This limits usage and creates difficulty in following circular routes. Cyclists also raise concern regarding plans highlighted within the Malvern Hills Conservators Forward Plan to ban cyclists from certain areas of the Hills. Cyclists identify that these areas are the best areas for riding and are less used by walkers and are therefore a cause for concern.

Quality

6.21 The methodology for assessing quality is set out in Part 2 (Methodology). The table below summarises the results of the quality assessment for green corridors in Malvern Hills District. The threshold for assessing quality has been set at 60%; this is based on Green Flag criteria. Individual site summaries can be found at the end of this section.

Table 6.2: Quality scores for green corridors by analysis area

Analysis area	QUALITY Scores					Number at:	
	maximum score	lowest score	MEAN score	highest score	spread	below 60%	above 60%
Malvern Town area	63	38%	39%	40%	2%	2	-
Rural areas	63	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tenbury Town area	63	-	-	-	-	-	-
Upton and Hanley areas	63	54%	54%	54%	-	1	-
MALVERN HILLS DISTRICT	63	38%	44%	54%	16%	3	-

6.22 The mean score for the District sits below the threshold (44%). All of the green corridors visited are assessed as low quality. This reinforces the need to improve green corridor provision identified through consultation. For example, none of the sites visited have surfaces suitable for wheelchair users.

6.23 Although users consider provision of footpaths to be adequate in terms of quantity consultation identifies concerns regarding the quality of footpath provision. The perception amongst the majority of users is that there are a high percentage of footpaths in the District which are in an unusable condition due to either lack of maintenance or obstructions. The latest Worcestershire Best Value Performance Indicator 178 (BVPI 178), undertaken in 2005, found that 63.1% of the Counties 3000 miles of PROW to be easy to use. This result is good in comparison to the neighbouring County Councils of Gloucestershire (51.7%, 2004/5), Herefordshire

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(43.5%, 2003/4) and Shropshire (40%, 2003/4). WCC has a target of achieving a 2% improvement each year.

- 6.24 On the other hand, responses from Malvern Hills parish path wardens, who are particularly familiar with PROW with their parish, suggest that PROW provision is adequate or better in terms of quality.
- 6.25 The key quality issues identified through user consultation regarding footpaths relate to overgrown or blocked footpaths, poor way marking/signage, dog fouling and difficult stiles/gates. There is particular concern within the Ripple Ward regarding electric fences, which act as a barrier to usage.
- 6.26 Users identify the biggest deterrent for the use of PROW in Malvern Hills District to be overgrowth of crops and vegetation, followed by absence of signage and way marking. It is felt by users that there is a need for a number of clearly defined routes that are of good quality and well signed to enable the routes to be accessible to all, particularly less able/experienced users.
- 6.27 Consultation identifies opinion amongst users that WCC PROW resources should be prioritised to focusing and improving key routes that are more popular amongst users.

Value

- 6.28 The methodology for assessing value is set out in Part 2 (Methodology). The table below summarises the results of the value assessment for green corridors in Malvern Hills District. A score of 20% or less is considered to indicate that a site has low value.

Table 6.3: Value scores for green corridors by analysis area

Analysis area	VALUE Scores					Number at:	
	maximum score	lowest score	MEAN score	highest score	spread	below 20%	above 20%
Malvern Town area	100	22%	32%	41%	19%	-	2
Rural areas	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tenbury Town area	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
Upton and Hanley areas	100	42%	42%	42%	-	-	1
MALVERN HILLS DISTRICT	100	22%	35%	42%	20%	-	3

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- 6.29 All of the green corridors score high in terms of value. This is due to the ecological/biological value associated with green corridors as wildlife corridors and also the amenity and health benefits offered by the provision.

Community involvement

- 6.30 A network of parish path wardens supports WCC Countryside Service in helping to maintain footpaths within the County. Duties include path inspections, liaison with landowners, waymarking, vegetation clearance, minor repairs, leading guided walks and writing guidebooks or leaflets.
- 6.31 WCC runs training programmes for volunteers to undertake general maintenance of the PROW network e.g. of stiles and fencing.
- 6.32 Worcestershire has a local access forum. The Forum comprises representatives of user groups, landowners, local authority elected members and other organisations with an interest in access issues in the countryside and the towns. The Forum considers and advises on access issues; including close involvement in the preparation of the ROWIP for Worcestershire and other related issues. The Forum appears to be popular and attendance is high. It is a successful method of user engagement.

Green corridors summary

Current provision

- In total there is 403¹ hectares of green corridor provision across Malvern Hills. Public rights of way (PROW) - footpaths and bridleways - make up 376 hectares. The remaining 27 hectares consists of Malvern Common (Guarlford Road), Newland green corridor and Upton-upon-Severn waterfront path.

Future provision

- There is a shortfall of bridleway and off-road cycling provision across Malvern Hills and there is demand for increased provision for carriage driving. Footpath provision is generally good in terms of quantity and the need to investigate the feasibility of upgrading PROW to cater for more uses was identified.

Other issues

- The key quality issues, identified through user consultation, regarding PROW relate to overgrown or blocked footpaths, poor way marking/signage, dog fouling and difficult stiles/gates.
- Potential new routes including the disused railway line linking Great Malvern and Upton-upon-Severn were identified.