

## Greenways: an initial evaluation

**The Greenways demonstration programme has explored the development of shared-use, car-free and off-road routes.**

### Introduction

In June 1999, the Countryside Agency issued a challenge to local authorities to create Greenways (defined as: shared-use, car-free off-road routes for a range of users and journey purposes) in every town and city. Authorities would achieve this through the creation of new off-road routes and by improving those that already exist. This was a process already being tested through demonstrations established in Spring 1998.

The aim of this Greenways demonstration programme was to:

- help Government deliver its integrated transport policy;
- assist Government to meet the targets for a healthier population through the provision of opportunities for exercise and sports training close to home;
- counteract social exclusion by providing access opportunities for people who rarely experience the outdoors through lack of transport or confidence.

The programme was set up following earlier research summarised in CCRN 4. This had revealed a demand for shared use routes for travel and recreation, but that existing and potential users needed a guarantee of quality. It also showed that the existing quality of shared use routes was variable. The Countryside Commission, a predecessor body to the Countryside Agency, found strong support from local authorities for it to champion the concept of Greenways.

At that time, Greenways were conceived as recreational routes, an emphasis initially retained by some of the demonstration areas. This shifted with the development of the Government's integrated transport policy and the introduction of targets for an increase in walking and cycling as modes of transport. One of the challenges to the demonstrations as a result has been to develop partnerships across different professional boundaries.

## Summary of the Greenways programme

The elements to the programme have been:

- demonstration of the Greenways development process;
- the creation of a website for the provision of advice and information and to encourage networking;
- the promotion of the programme.

This research note reviews each of these activities and describes how the lessons learned are being applied in the future. There was originally a fourth element, the development of an accreditation process, but this was dropped when it was found to be unworkable.

## Demonstration areas

In Spring 1998, seven Greenways demonstrations were established around England to test ideas and overcome problems in the creation and management of multi-user routes for walking, cycling and riding which would be safe, accessible and multi-purpose.

The original seven demonstration areas were selected through Countryside Commission regional recommendation, though two were later replaced. One of the objectives was to cover a range of geographical factors, population and size, local and regional economy. Having already concluded that strong partnerships would be essential, testing the potential for existing community forest partnerships to deliver Greenways networks was also an objective. The Countryside Commission made a deliberate choice to work across the range of local authorities to ensure that the lessons learned could be applied in a variety of situations.

The demonstration areas - and reasons for choosing them - are described below.

- **Furness**  
A local authority, private and voluntary sector partnership including Sustrans located on the southern edge of the Lake District National Park.
- **South East Dorset**  
Founded on Bournemouth and Poole, but expanded to include other local authorities, including Dorset County Council. This demonstration was chosen because of the need to balance the demands of tourism and environmental protection in an area where there were few obvious 'corridors' for future route development.
- **Mersey Forest**  
A complex multiple authority and community forest partnership with a commitment to deliver a route network in the forest plan.
- **Watling Chase**  
Also based on a community forest partnership, though far smaller. Located in southern Hertfordshire. The Local Transport Plan was being developed and there were potential links to outer London boroughs.
- **Lincoln**  
A county town with satellite housing estates, deprived rural hinterland and strong local demand for a network. The project was seen at the outset as a bridge between district and county to overcome cultural and political differences.
- **Swindon**  
Replaced two original choices. It was chosen as a new unitary authority developing a relationship with its county, with a rapidly growing urban fabric surrounded by attractive countryside. There was also an existing community forest partnership.

## Demonstration findings

A great deal has been achieved by all of the demonstration projects under a variety of circumstances. The essential elements of a “good” Greenways project are:

- a carefully selected partnership with a clear vision;
- SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-related) objectives and a checklist/process to follow;
- good communication both within the partnership and outside of it;
- access to relevant expertise and knowledge;
- good co-ordination and clear processes;
- ability to learn from mistakes and adapt to changing circumstances;
- inclusion in the right strategies and policies;
- proper research;
- a Strategy and Action Plan;
- a high level of community and user involvement;
- ability to influence organisations and authorities and access funding.

The role of Greenways as part of a wider network is important. Some of the demonstration projects have questioned the value of separating out Greenways from the rest of the network, especially as Greenways have no legal definition or standing. It is therefore encouraging and not surprising that in some of the demonstration projects, work on Greenways is being combined with existing work areas, mainly rights of way, access and sustainable transport. The findings from the demonstrations are covered in more detail on the website at [www.greenways.gov.uk](http://www.greenways.gov.uk).

## Website

The Greenways and Quiet Roads (now Quiet Lanes) website was launched in February 1999. It informs local authorities about the programme of demonstrations, provides advice and, through the discussion element, provides a means to share good practice. The website was an innovative step at the time, particularly the decision to make technical information available on line rather than published as hard copy.

The website at [www.greenways.gov.uk](http://www.greenways.gov.uk) has been a popular site, with an average of 7,448 hits per annum. It has fulfilled three needs:

- promotion of Greenways;
- dissemination of advice;
- sharing best practice.

Initially the site was very effective in achieving these roles, but a great deal of staff time has proved necessary to maintain it effectively - updating information, monitoring the discussion board and re-design. The site will be re-designed again in the spring of 2003 when it will become incorporated in the main Countryside Agency site. It has been a valuable resource and point of reference for local authorities and others wishing to understand Greenways and the sister initiative, Quiet Lanes.

### Promotion of Greenways

A range of Greenways promotional material including bookmarks and coasters was produced and circulated nationally during the demonstration programme. The success of this promotion, combined with the impact of the website and regular press releases by the Countryside Agency, has helped make “Greenways” a term of use far beyond the original demonstration authorities. A review of all the Local Transport Plans in England in the summer of 2002 showed at least 18 authorities outside the demonstration areas referred to the development of Greenways in some shape or form.

As part of the promotional programme a particular style of the word “Greenways” was developed:

*Greenways*  
the way to go

This style and the solitary letter “G” are now being used by local authorities to signpost the increasing number of Greenways on the ground.



Further information is available from the Greenways website:  
[www.greenways.gov.uk](http://www.greenways.gov.uk)

Countryside Agency Research Notes can also be viewed on our website:  
[www.countryside.gov.uk](http://www.countryside.gov.uk)