



**ramblers**

at the heart of walking

# Northamptonshire Area

*"The Ramblers' Association promotes rambling, protects rights of way, campaigns for access to open country and defends the beauty of the countryside"*

**Local Groups: Daventry, Kettering, Northampton, Wellingborough, 20s/30s**

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## **Ramblers' response to the Northamptonshire Local Transport Plan: Draft for Consultation, November 2011**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Ramblers' Association (the Ramblers') is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales, founded as a voluntary body in 1935. Its registered office is at 2nd Floor, Camelford House, 87–90 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TW. Nationally, it has approximately 115,000 members, with about 1,100 in Northamptonshire (mostly in the 'NN' postcode area). The Ramblers' is the largest organisation which campaigns to protect the interests of walkers, to defend rights of way and the beauty of the countryside, and to secure access to open country. By walkers we mean anybody who walks for any legitimate reason, such as, for example, ordinary transport from home to work or amenities; thus we are not concerned solely with recreational walking or with rural locations.

We are grateful for the opportunity to comment on the draft Local Transport Plan. We agree with the emphasis on sustainable modes of transport. We have not sought to comment on all of the issues in the draft plan, and have concentrated on those about which we have particular knowledge or expertise. Our failure to respond to any particular section does not necessarily indicate support for that part of the draft framework.

### **AIM – Page 9**

#### **Fit for the Future**

Walking is the most sustainable form of transport and has proven health benefits. Footpath provision is low cost in transport terms.

### **Fit for the Community**

People meet on footpaths which encourages social interaction, encourages people to 'own' the paths and streets, helping to keep good order and helping to create successful, strong, cohesive and sustainable communities.

### **Fit to Choose**

Footpaths make valuable contributions to travel from home to school, work and amenities. The Council should ensure footpaths are safe, pleasant to use, planned to design out crime, and with provision of safe road crossings.

### **Fit for the Environment**

Walking is the lowest carbon form of transport. It reduces car use thus benefiting congestion.

### **Fit for Best Value**

Footpath provision is low cost in transport terms

## **STRATEGIC POLICIES – Page 52**

### **Fit for the Future**

We support **strategic policy 1** and the introduction of effective and attractive sustainable transport options.

Walking is the most sustainable, lowest carbon, form of transport and provides an excellent transport choice for distances of up to one mile – although we note that London commuters will be advised to walk up to 2.5 miles (1 hour) to avoid tube congestion during the Olympics. Walks of the latter length are well within the capabilities of the more active members of the community.

The Ramblers' support saved policy 10 (Appendix 1 of the Transportation Plan) which seeks to preserve the former Northampton-Bedford railway from development which could prevent its use as a transport corridor. The use of former railways for sustainable transport could ameliorate congestion on the road network and thus contribute to the objectives of **strategic policy 1**, and provide walking and cycling routes for **strategic policy 2**.

We suggest other old railway lines also should be protected from development, notably the former Northampton-Peterborough line. This line could form a safe, sustainable bypass of the A45/A605 for non-motorised forms of transport. Part is already a pedestrian/cycleway thanks to the Stanwick Lakes initiative. It should be extended to Wellingborough and Northampton, and should be extended north from Thrapston to Oundle, Warmington, etc, using existing bridleways, byways and minor roads where the old railway is no longer available.

We support **strategic policy 2** and the provision of walking routes to allow ease of movements between new developments and existing facilities. However, we note a lack of good footpath maps of our towns. Wellingborough, for example, has many green spaces well provided with all-

weather footpaths and cycleways, but they can only be found by exploring the town on foot. Northampton too has many footpaths, some (or many) unknown even to rambler residents of the borough. The mapping of urban footpaths is, to our knowledge, absent or inadequate. This should be remedied as part of this transport plan. The maps should allow provision of recommended pedestrian and cycle routes from new developments to existing and new facilities, e.g. from the west Northampton development to the town centre. Mapping of urban paths and ways would greatly benefit both the provision of sustainable transport routes and walks for leisure and health.

Lost ways and forgotten footpaths will be lost for ever if they are not claimed by the year 2026. This results from one of the most contentious provisions of the Countryside and Rights of Way ('CROW') Act 2000 which will extinguish all historic rights of way that have not been legally recorded by 1 January 2026. Research into lost ways is being undertaken by the Ramblers'. The County Council could assist this search for our forgotten historic roads and ways by making its archive of relevant documents available for study. These are known to include footpath schedules, maps and landowner deposits gathered in 1934 in response to the 1932 Rights of Way Act, and similar material dating from 1950 in response to the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act. The Ramblers' would be pleased to assist in this project.

### **Fit for the Community**

We support **strategic Policy 9**, the support for healthier lifestyles, safe routes to school, walking and cycling schemes. There is much that can be done to make footpaths and walking fit for the community.

Walking is of course an excellent mode of sustainable transport, and also excellent for health walks and as an informal leisure activity. The Council should not neglect the use of rural footpaths for health and leisure. Well maintained footpaths (well waymarked, upgrowth regularly cut) are well appreciated and surprisingly well used by the public, as can be seen in the Fermyn Woods Country Park – Lyveden – Wadenhoe area, which has benefited from improvements by the County to the Lyveden Way.

We suggest the County should set an example by regular maintenance of field-edge footpaths, and, by employing farmers to carry out this maintenance, encourage them to pay attention to crossfield paths for which they are responsible. Ordinary walkers enjoy walking paths they can see.

Walking is well worth supporting as part of a healthier lifestyle. Walking is good for the health: good for the heart and lungs; good for the muscles and bones; good for the mind and spirit. It has the advantage of low impact on joints. Medical opinion agrees that regular physical activity like walking helps protect the body from many illnesses and conditions, including heart disease and stroke, high blood pressure, osteoarthritis, obesity, the most common type of diabetes and many cancers.

Urban footpaths should be of a quality which people are happy to use. They should be designed in accordance with the principles of good design: the routes should be direct to complement desire lines; of generous width (as appropriate to site context); doglegs and blind spots should be avoided; and paths should be overlooked and well lit. The supplementary planning guidance, 'Planning out Crime in Northamptonshire', adopted countywide in Feb 2004, should be a saved policy of the transport plan.

Road Crossing can be unacceptably hazardous in both urban and rural situations. Use of our rural rights of way may be unfeasible if the route involves crossing busy high speed trunk and principle roads (A14, A43, A45); villagers may feel it impossible to walk to their local country park and may take the car instead (e.g. Brixworth village across the bypass to Brixworth Country Park; Stanwick village across the A45 to Stanwick Lakes Country Park). In urban situations walkers may be faced with long delays at light controlled crossings (e.g. Becketts Park to Derngate) with the danger that walkers may be tempted to run red lights: hence we support saved policy GR10 which promises altering the signal phasing at crossings to give greater priority to pedestrians and cyclists. Uncontrolled road crossings may be dangerous enough to deter walkers and cause them to prefer cars. The dangers of road crossing equally apply to bus passengers in those situations where they attempt to cross a road when alighting from a bus –which may cause the potential passenger to take a car instead. The Transport Plan should give high priority to addressing the problem of road crossings, including the problems of bus passengers, in both town and country, especially with the emphasis on sustainable transport and healthy recreation.

We have sympathy with **Strategic Policy 10** regarding what can be delivered with available resources. We note that footpath provision is low cost in transport terms. In certain cases use of existing rights of way and/or creation of new links can remove the need for footbridges across major roads. In other cases we suggest that grade-separated footpath crossings should be provided as part of major road schemes.

### **Fit to Choose**

We support **Strategic Policy 11**, and are pleased that the Council will work with partners to improve walking, cycling and public transport infrastructure in the county. Walking should be included in the smarter choices measures of the Transportation Plan (page 59).

Walking choices, travel planning and awareness campaigns would be greatly aided if the County adopts the mapping of urban paths and ways as a policy of the Transportation Plan (see above)

### **Fit for Economic Growth**

We note **Strategic Policy 12** and the aim to improve the highway infrastructure. We suggest that the need of the non-motorised traveller is not forgotten. Grade-separated pedestrian/cycle facility should be provided as part of major developments such as flyovers. Grade-separated provision for footpaths to cross roads is essential for the safety of walkers in both urban and rural situations.

Where new roads bypass older roads then the old road should be converted into a 'quiet lane' for walkers and cyclists (e.g. Ditchford Lane will no longer be needed as a through route for cars when the new cross-valley link is built as part of the Wellingborough East development; Ditchford river bridge should then be closed to cars, leaving the lane as a sustainable transport corridor).

### **Fit for the Environment**

We note **Strategic Policy 16** and the aim to reduce transport-related carbon emissions in Northamptonshire by making low carbon transport modes more attractive and easier to use.

Walking and cycling provision is an excellent way of reducing carbon emissions.

### **Fit for Best Value**

Footpath provision is low cost in transport terms

### **Fit to Deliver**

We support the policy of increasing the number of short trips that are made on foot. Walking should be the transport of choice for distances of up to one mile: this should be Council policy.

Encouraging people to make more trips on foot helps communities take ownership of their streets with benefit to community spirit and reduction of anti-social activity.

People must be able to cross carriageways safely and without undue delay or diversion.

### **DAUGHTER DOCUMENTS – page 67**

We look forward to the daughter document on Walking.

### **SPEND PROGRAMME - page 76**

We are pleased to see Sustainable Travel as part of the spend programme. We suggest that it is inadequate to rely on community requests. County input is required to show communities, especially car-based communities, what is possible. We suggest the amount of £100,000 is far too low – a great deal more than is allowed for by this costing could be achieved to the benefit of reduction of car use, reduction of congestion, reduction of carbon emissions, improvement to healthy lifestyles and to community ownership of streets. Sustainable walking and cycling schemes has far too little funding.

We note that spending on Rights of Way is concatenated with highway, footway and bridge maintenance. Consequently it is difficult for us to comment. Rights of way should not be the poor relation and deserves its own budget line to make clear the provision.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Walking is an excellent form of sustainable transport, is excellent for health, and provides an excellent informal leisure activity in our predominantly rural county. The right policies and practices should be put in place to support the choice to walk

The transportation plan should recognise fully the benefits of walking by ensuring provision of well designed safe footpaths which people are pleased to use and which the community is pleased own, to the benefit of all.

Walking should be the preferred mode of transport for journeys of one mile or less.

Rural footpaths should be properly maintained to encourage use.

The difficulty of crossing carriageways in both urban and rural situations should be recognised and safe crossing facilities provided.

Former railway lines should be protected from development to provide sustainable transport corridors and bypasses of major roads for the non-motorised traveller.

The County should support research into lost ways notably by making archive material available.

Will Lovell

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[www.ramblers.org.uk/](http://www.ramblers.org.uk/)

[www.northantsramblers.org.uk/](http://www.northantsramblers.org.uk/)

**Ramblers: at the heart of walking**

The Ramblers' Association is a registered charity (England & Wales no 1093577. Scotland no SC039799) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England & Wales (no 4458492.) Registered office, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, Camelford House, 87-90 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TW.