

Unlocking access in the Gap – on two wheels

Remember the first bike ride you took beyond adult supervision? The excitement and independence? Cycling nurtures exploration and problem-solving. It's also simply fun. Unfortunately, children's freedom has greatly reduced over the last century. The average distance children are allowed to wander from home has declined from six miles to 300 yards, a reduction of 97%.¹ This is due partly to the "Stranger Danger" campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s. These are now seen as over-simplistic and even counter-productive, as the fear induced in some children knocked their confidence.² Another major factor is of course the increase in road traffic, and the perceived danger of cycling on our roads.

Oxfordshire's population rose by 10.9% between 2011 and 2021 (compared to 6.6% for England as a whole)³, and is forecast to rise by a further 11% by 2031⁴. We can all see the new housing, particularly around the fringes of Wallingford and Benson, but also in Goring and Streatley. Oxfordshire has one of the highest rates of cars ownership in the UK⁵, so it's no surprise that our roads are getting busier and busier. Lots of new houses, but little corresponding investment in transport infrastructure.



"Where can I take the kids for a ride now that they're bored with going to the South Stoke shop and back?"

The growth in traffic has led to the ironic situation in which parents would like their children to cycle or walk to school, but perceive the roads to be too dangerous, so they take them by car instead. Places to learn to cycle in Goring and Streatley are limited. There are relatively few quiet roads where new riders can practise (whether children or adults) and develop their skills. There are even fewer opportunities to start travelling further. The best available route currently is the bridleway to South Stoke, which after a little climb away from Mill Lane, is a good ride for novices when it's not too muddy. Wouldn't we like our children to have the same sort of opportunities for independence and exploration that their parents and grandparents enjoyed? Could we dare to hope that it's possible?

The times they are a-changin'

Countries around the world have begun to realise that the answer is not more roads. More roads simply lead to more traffic and more congestion, a phenomenon known as induced demand⁶. Average cars speeds in central London decreased from about 12 miles per hour between 1977 and 1982 to 9.5 miles per hour in 2021.⁷



Most trips are relatively short: 25% of trips under one mile, and 71% under five miles⁸. Cycling and walking use much less road space⁹ and are more efficient for short journeys. Cities have introduced clean air zones, reduced speed limits and increased charges (eg vehicle tax, parking) for larger cars. Air pollution in Paris has been cut by half in the last 20 years, mainly due to restrictions on vehicles and increased public transport and cycling infrastructure¹⁰. Casualties in Wales fell by 35% in the 12 months after the introduction of the 20 mph speed limit, with 100 fewer people killed or seriously injured¹¹. Research also suggests that journey times do not significantly increase¹².

Locally, Goring has had a 20 mph speed limit on all its streets since May 2023. Government research has shown that "you are seven times more likely to survive if you are hit by a car driving at 20mph, than if you are hit at 30mph"¹³. The removal of parking spaces from Station Road in Goring is an example

of reallocating road space to people. It has made Station Road safer for cyclists and pedestrians as well as for users of mobility aids. New bike stands around the village enable more short trips.

Active Travel

The government buzzword for investing in cycling and walking infrastructure is "Active Travel". It means making journeys in physically active ways - like walking, wheeling (using a wheelchair or mobility aid), cycling, or scootering. Governments are interested in Active Travel because of reduced costs of healthcare (physical and mental), less reliance on fossil fuels and quicker progress to net zero:

- Happier. Mental health is boosted by activity and time outdoors in nature
- Healthier. Increased activity improves fitness and health. Less traffic pollution means fewer respiratory problems
- Greener. Reduced congestion on the roads means lower carbon emissions

In February 2025 the Government announced "Almost £300m to gear up new walking, wheeling and cycling schemes"¹⁴ in England. Not that much in the big scheme of things, when you think that one motorway junction improvement (the M25/A3 junction improvement) alone cost £317m, but enough to make a difference. including £500,000 for active travel in rural areas".

"Making it simple and safe to walk, wheel or cycle to schools, shops and workplaces is one of the most effective actions we can take to improve the nation's health, economy and get to net zero, all in one."

Chris Boardman CBE, National Active Travel Commissioner (and Olympic gold medallist)

What's happening locally?

Better cycling infrastructure in our cities is resulting in more people using their bike instead of the car. The City of London has reported an increase of over 50% in daily cycle journeys between 2022 and 2024¹⁵. Government investment is now filtering its way down into local authorities' budgets. Oxfordshire County Council (OCC)'s capital budget for 2025/26 includes "£1.8m for active travel measures to encourage walking and cycling including £500,000 for active travel in rural areas"¹⁶. West Berkshire's budget has £1.65m for Active Travel¹⁷.

In April 2024 Oxfordshire published its Strategic Active Travel Network, which includes a Strategic/Primary link between Goring and Wallingford. The Council is now moving ahead with preparation of Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) for those urban areas that do not already have them. A consultation on the Wallingford area LCWIP closed in March, but its geographic scope did not extend as far Goring, despite there being a significant number of local residents who shop or work in Wallingford and would like to be able to get there more easily by bike.

In February 2025 the Mend The Gap project published a report commissioned by the Chilterns Conservation Board, looking at both existing public access and potential improvements in access provision within the Mend The Gap project area¹⁸. "One of the strategic priorities of the Mend the Gap programme is to improve access for all, making it easier for local communities and visitors to access and enjoy this part of the National Landscapes" (The Chilterns and North Wessex Downs). The report recommends "the development of safe, continuous active travel corridors, such as Goring to Wallingford".

Where does this leave us?

Unlocking access in the Gap in the March GGN showed the progress there has been on improving accessibility to walking routes in the Gap for those with mobility issues. We also need to improve accessibility for another marginalised group – our children.

The bridleway route to South Stoke is one journey that is relatively accessible to new riders, as it is fairly flat and mainly traffic-free. The logical answer would be to carry on along to Wallingford, but this is not possible at present, despite there being plenty of demand. The path through the fields from South Stoke to Little Stoke is a footpath with stiles, and not legal for cycling. The alternative is to use the B4009, which most parents (and some experienced cyclists) find too dangerous. Implementing the Mend the Gap report recommendation for a safe continuous active travel corridor will make it possible for young riders to travel further safely. It would also enable people to cycle to Crowmarsh and Wallingford for shopping or work instead of driving.



Would you let your child cycle here? Leaving South Stoke on the B4009 towards North Stoke



This path allows cyclists to get from Hermitage to Hampstead Norreys, without using the busy B4009.

As a start, some simple changes could be made to enable more cycling in the villages, instead of discouraging it:

- Reclassify the footpath from the end of Manor Road to Gatehampton as a bridleway. It's a wide track already and makes a flat exercise circuit, easily accessible from the village.
- Resurface the footpath from Lockstile Way to the Bourdillon Field, and reclassify it, to make it easier for Goring pupils to cycle or scoot to school. It will be better for parents with buggies also.
- Reclassify the footpath from the Morrell Room to the top of the Cleeve Court access road via Streatley Rec. A short stretch of new path is needed, to exit the Rec through the gate to the east of the children's playground. This provides an alternative route towards The Ridgeway Trail along Rectory Road, and remove the need for cyclists to dodge the traffic on Streatley High Street.

Goring's MP, Freddie van Mierlo, has spoken out to say that "We have a golden opportunity to improve rural cycling infrastructure, and must not squander it"¹⁹.



The countryside around the Goring Gap is a lovely area for cycling, with lots of quiet roads and bridleways. The goringgapcycling.co.uk website has details of these, and has recently been upgraded to include more information for both would-be and experienced local cyclists. Scan the QR code.

These days it's always good to be able to check the facts. All the sources quoted here are referenced in the online version of this article, with links to the actual source documents, available at www.goringgapcycling.co.uk/active-travel.

Steve Rock is a retired civil engineer and the developer of the goringgapcycling.co.uk website.

If the article is over-length, omit the Chris Boardman quote box. If it is too short, include the following image:



What's not to like? The track from Manor Road to Gatehampton functions like a bridleway, so should be classified as one.

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- ¹ See https://issuu.com/ctc_cyclists/docs/movefree_190324_createstreets and <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-462091/How-children-lost-right-roam-generations.html>
 - ² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/stories-45813069>
 - ³ <https://data.oxfordshire.gov.uk/census-2021-results-highlight-oxfordshires-growing-population/>
 - ⁴ <https://data.oxfordshire.gov.uk/oxfordshire-housing-led-population-forecasts-august-2024-update-2022-2031/>
 - ⁵ <https://www.plumplot.co.uk/Oxfordshire-census-2021.html#:~:text=Oxfordshire%20car%20availability%20in%20a,it's%201.23%20cars%20per%20household>
 - ⁶ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c0e5848e5274a0bf3cbe124/latest-evidence-on-induced-travel-demand-and-evidence-review.pdf>
 - ⁷ [London Assembly \(2022\) Average Traffic Speed in London Supporting Tables Question No: 2022/0832](#)
 - ⁸ <https://roadsafetygb.org.uk/news/survey-lifts-the-lids-on-2023-travel-habits/#:~:text=The%20data%20also%20shows%20most,consistent%20with%202022%20and%202019.>
 - ⁹ <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/tackling-the-climate-emergency/travel-more-sustainably/>
 - ¹⁰ <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20250409-air-pollution-in-paris-region-cut-in-half-over-the-past-20-years>
 - ¹¹ <https://www.gov.wales/safest-summer-welsh-roads-new-statistics-show#:~:text=They%20show%20there%20were%20around,same%20period%20a%20year%20before>
 - ¹² <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/transport-and-travel/traffic/20mph-scheme/20mph-transformation-programme>
 - ¹³ <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/transport-and-travel/traffic/20mph-scheme/20mph-transformation-programme>
 - ¹⁴ <https://www.activetravelengland.gov.uk/news/almost-ps300m-gear-new-walking-wheeling-and-cycling-schemes>
 - ¹⁵ <https://news.cityoflondon.gov.uk/city-cycling-soars-to-record-levels/#:~:text=The%20City%20of%20London%20Corporation,50%2C000%20from%2089%2C000%20in%202022>
 - ¹⁶ <https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/budget-for-202526/>
 - ¹⁷ <https://decisionmaking.westberks.gov.uk/documents/s132027/6.2.1%20Appendix%20A%20Planned%20Capital%20Programme%202025-26.pdf>
 - ¹⁸ https://mendthegap.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2025/03/MTG-access-improvements-Final-report-compressed_1.pdf
 - ¹⁹ https://parliamentnews.co.uk/we-have-a-golden-opportunity-to-improve-rural-cycling-infrastructure-which-we-must-not-squander/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZWQCMTEAAR1qMm6SP6ZBATPcnmMINb5GRdjbIT1q9aWaZvW-s3QnLdehFtN5Pjxas_aem_0pvBQ_SN8I_SPN1lyAAEzg
and https://www.thamehub.co.uk/local-mp-secures-westminster-debate-on-cycling-infrastructure-in-rural-areas/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZWQCMTEAR0fR07MpMOJ9ruVF89I7k-ZVhXI_sehICPBj2F9KJyW6leTcjCf2DLejeo_aem_hFWr-lbLhN9bQU91Oorr-A