GREEN ACTIVE TRAVEL ROUTES

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Central Scotland Green Network
DEFINING GREEN ACTIVE TRAVEL ROUTES

“Green active travel routes create attractive places and journeys for people and improve the environment. The deliberate choice to combine natural planting, greenery or water systems together with paths for people on foot or bike delivers a range of benefits. From environmental improvements such as increased habitat and biodiversity to improved health and well-being for people.”

What do we mean when we talk about ‘green active travel’ routes?

Active travel can be defined as the means of transport for necessary journeys - such as commuting or going to school, that requires physical activity - such as cycling, walking or scootering (rather than using motorised or carbon-dependent vehicles).

Green infrastructure is defined by The European Commission as “the use of ecosystems, greenspaces and water [...] to deliver environmental and quality of life benefits. It includes parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands, wetlands, road verges, allotments and private gardens.” Their definition also highlights the benefits of green infrastructure, which include “climate change mitigation and adaptation, natural disaster risk mitigation, protection against flooding and erosion as well as biodiversity conservation.” Green infrastructure delivers its biggest environmental benefits when it forms a network of diverse different green and blue (water-based) spaces across a rural or urban area. These spaces may be of differing ownership, size and condition, but together they form a green network that benefits both environment through biodiversity, climate change resilience, water management, and habitat, as well as people via health and well-being benefits connected with exposure to natural settings.

This green infrastructure network can be intentionally integrated with a network of active travel routes. This might be via retrofitting new active travel routes to existing green corridors, introducing or enhancing green infrastructure along an existing active travel route, or by newly planning both active travel routes and green infrastructure together from the start. The result is a sum that is more than its parts. By deliberately integrating the creation or enhancement of active travel movement routes for people, with improved green networks typically considered as benefitting environment, we can create attractive routes that deliver mutually beneficial results for both people, the environment and beyond.

This integrated or combined approach can also lead to more joined up, co-ordinated management approaches that view green active travel routes as coherent pieces of infrastructure, increased partnership working with other organisations and volunteers, improved social connectedness and feelings of ownership, improved use of green infrastructure spaces, and additional health and well-being benefits that combine physical activity, with health and well-being boosted by connection with the natural environment.
INTRODUCTION

Green active travel routes create attractive places and journeys for people and improve the environment. The deliberate choice to combine natural planting or water systems together with paths for people on foot or bike delivers a range of benefits. From environmental improvements such as increased habitat and biodiversity to improved health and wellbeing for people. Here, we present a number of exemplar green active travel routes from around the world as inspiring case studies of what can be achieved using this approach, and the lessons that can be learned.

These case studies highlight the fact that each green active travel route is different. What is achievable will vary dependent on location, context, budget, political support, and the range of potential partners for that locality. The case studies presented here are intended to give a flavour of what can be achieved - as both inspiration and to provide key learnings for others aspiring to implement their own green active travel routes. This suite of case studies includes projects at a variety of different scales and set within different contexts worldwide. They include green active travel routes that have been recently implemented or improved, retrofitted or newly planned, and which are exemplary for one or more aspects.

The five exemplar green active travel case studies looked at in more detail are:

- **Green Cycle Routes, Copenhagen**: cycle and pedestrian network for green commuting
- **Green Network, Hamburg**: masterplan and strategy for a green active travel network
- **Connswater Community Greenway, East Belfast**: a living landmark for East Belfast
- **Greener Greenways, across the UK**: a large scale initiative promoting biodiversity
- **Little France Park, Edinburgh**: an initiative integrating active travel routes within a masterplan
PROJECT BACKGROUND

The five green active travel case studies demonstrate real-life examples of the ways active travel routes can be combined with green infrastructure and habitat networks to result in positive outcomes for both people and environment. The case studies include a diverse mix of green active travel routes which offer learning, inspiration, and practical examples of the ways green (and blue) networks can be successfully integrated as a core part of new infrastructure aimed at increasing cycling and walking.

There are many different ways this integration of green infrastructure and active travel routes can be planned, delivered and managed, depending on scale, context, location, and budget. Whilst no example is perfect, the case studies presented here aim to demonstrate a mix of achievable and aspirational projects, from the UK and beyond, and at both larger, strategic scales, and smaller, local-level interventions. They focus on recently implemented projects that have, in some way, successfully brought together active travel and greening. Information was gathered from both the project management teams who delivered these projects, as well as the end users of the routes (such as local residents, interest groups, cyclists and pedestrians) to give the fullest picture of these successful green active travel routes, the benefits they have brought about and any practical lessons learnt in implementation.

POLICY CONTEXT

In the last few years there has been a significant increase in active travel delivery focussed on improving hard infrastructure, better signage and behaviour change. This has been supported by planning policy and guidance, including the National Planning Framework 3, A Long-term Vision for Active Travel in Scotland 2030, Let’s Get Scotland Walking – The National Walking Strategy, and the Cycling Action Plan for Scotland, amongst others. Additional policies relating to green infrastructure and/or active travel include the 2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity, Climate Ready Scotland: Scottish Climate Change Adaptation Programme, and Cleaner Air for Scotland – The Road to a Healthier Future.

The green active travel case studies presented here demonstrate, both within Scotland and the UK and internationally, how policies such as these can be practically realised through implementation of green active travel projects.
WHAT LESSONS CAN BE LEARNT?

Across the five green active travel case studies, a number of common themes and key learning points emerge:

- **Partnership working** is highly beneficial and helps ensure successful delivery. Organisations, landowners and other stakeholders are stronger working together around a common vision, and can realise efficiencies in mutually desirable outcomes.

- **Engagement with local communities** is key. This helps build feelings of ownership of local green active travel routes, increases their use by local people, and offers volunteers opportunities as part of ongoing management of the routes.

- **Green surroundings make the active travel experience more enjoyable** and attractive for users. Often resulting in their preferential use of green active travel routes over more direct routes. This also has health and well-being benefits.

- **A safer environment diversifies those using active travel** - green active travel routes often provide an alternative to busy on-road routes, encouraging feelings of safety and therefore a more diverse range of users (including those new to cycling or with children).

- **Retrofitting or newly planned approaches can work.** Whether retrofitting new or enhanced green infrastructure to existing active travel routes, adding new cycle or walking paths to existing greenspace, or newly planning both together from the start as part of a deliberate combined approach; all these methods can deliver successful green active travel routes with multiple benefits and positive impacts.

- **Think big and plan early** - where possible, early planning and being bold in terms of scale and application of green active travel routes helps achieve most impact. Whilst smaller scale green active travel routes can have significant positive impacts, thinking about larger networks or strategies at the city-scale, and ensuring these are built into spatial urban planning strategies early on, undoubtedly holds greater results.