

River Chess Access Strategy

February 2023

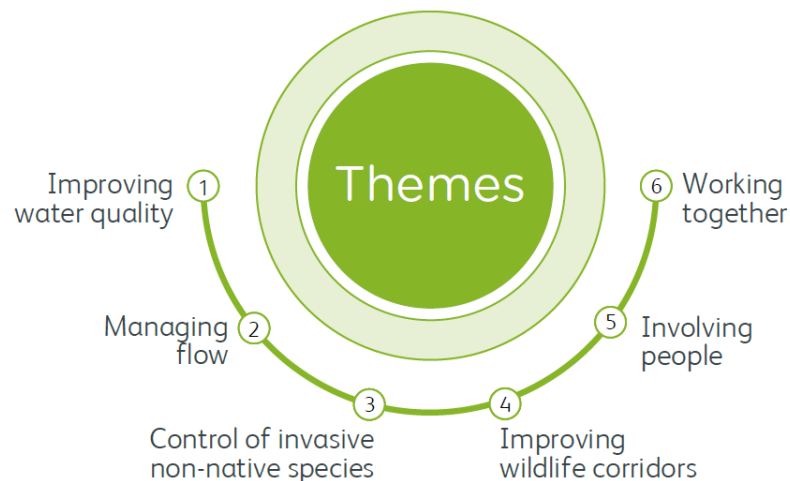


Introduction

The River Chess Smarter Water Catchment (SWC) project is taking a collaborative approach to creating a 10-year plan to protect and enhance the River Chess catchment. The premise of the 'smarter water catchments' approach is to take a systems based view of the environment, collectively addressing multiple challenges and co-delivering solutions that make the most of opportunities on an even bigger scale.

The River Chess SWC project is one of three SWC trials being funded by Thames Water. Year 2 of the SWC 'Involving People Action Plan' specifies the development of a strategic approach to public access and this is what this document seeks to address.

River Chess strategy



Background

Supporting policy and
local context



Supporting Plans and Policies - Buckinghamshire

Rights of Way Improvement Plan (2020-2030)

This strategic document sets out the council's goals and priorities for public rights of way and access over a 10 year period. The priorities stated include 'new connections' including urban-countryside paths, multi-user routes, routes to support the visitor economy and health and wellbeing and routes to work, school or local services.



Buckinghamshire Local Transport Plan 4 (2016-2036)

This plan sets out how transport can play its part in realising the council's vision to make Buckinghamshire a great place to live and work. The Plan covers all types of transport and looks ahead to 2036.

Relevant statements include:

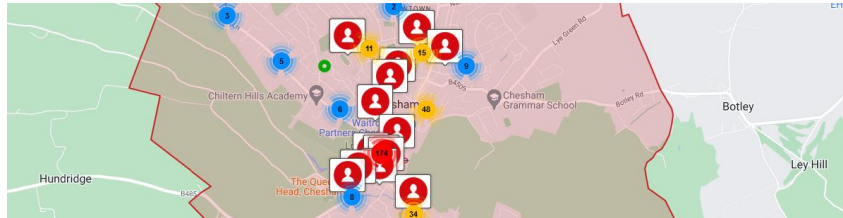
- Promote attractive links to and from stations by sustainable modes of transport, such as walking and cycling
- Work with local planning authorities to ensure that new developments are accessible by walking and new or upgraded routes are provided
- Make walking work for all users, for example by providing wider footways or places to rest

Supporting Plans and Policies - Buckinghamshire

Chesham Neighbourhood Plan

The overarching aim of the plan is to make it easier to create better, more beautiful, more sustainable development (and correspondingly harder to impose bad development) to take the pressure off the greenbelt and to make Chesham an even better and more prosperous place. The Neighbourhood Plan survey conducted in May 2022 included this finding amongst others:

The proximity of the Chilterns and views from and across the town are very important, and the River Chess is recognised as a precious resource that needs protecting.



Chiltern and South Bucks Open Space Strategy (Study)

This was a data gathering exercise focusing on the assessment of open spaces in the Chilterns and South Buckinghamshire areas. The study includes analysis of longer term actions to meet local needs, and a set of recommendations.

Key findings:

- Most open spaces have limited signage. Some just consist only of a track or waymarking posts
- Many open spaces would benefit from seating
- Access to open spaces is often “poor”

Supporting Plans and Policies - Hertfordshire

Hertfordshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan (2017-2028)

The plan provides the context for the future management of and investment in the rights of way network and other access activities, to meet people's needs and demands.

Core actions include:

- Develop routes that cater for the needs of people with limited mobility and visual impairments
- Reduce the number of physical barriers on the network, e.g. improve surfacing, remove or improve structures
- Develop links into the countryside from towns

Hertfordshire Sustainable Modes of Travel Strategy (SMoTS) (2022/23)

The strategy sets out the vision of Hertfordshire County Council to increase opportunities for children and young people to travel to, from and between educational establishments by sustainable modes.

Relevant goals include:

- Reduce the use of the car for journeys to, from and between educational establishments
- Improve the quality of the local environment by reducing traffic in and around educational sites

Three Rivers District Council Greenspace Audit (May 2019)

An open space study to provide the necessary robustness and direction to inform decisions on future strategic planning and any investment priorities for open spaces, indoor and outdoor sports facilities across Three Rivers District Council, Dacorum Borough Council and Hertsmere Borough Council.

Relevant findings:

- Analysis of the Chorleywood section of River Chess found quality to be "low"
- Analysis of River Chess Valley Walk in Rickmansworth found quality to be "high"

Local Groups and Projects

There are large number of projects and groups working in the Chilterns and the Chess Valley area and as such this section of the document is not intended to be an exhaustive list.

The Chiltern Society

Formed 60 years ago, The Chiltern Society's mission is to Campaign, Conserve and Promote the unique landscape of the Chilterns. Members and volunteers are tackling some of the most serious threats to the countryside – from climate change, to overbearing development, protecting rights of way access and disappearing green spaces and wildlife.

The River Chess Association

The River Chess Association was formed in 2009 in response to threats posed to this important chalk stream by human activities. Members are involved in a variety of tasks including variety of tasks, including photography, invasive weed control and flow monitoring.

Sustainable Chesham volunteer group

This group, made up of Chesham residents, aim to enable the local community to tackle the climate emergency. Projects include an ongoing tree planting scheme and flood risk lobbying and education.

The 'Zone 9' volunteer group were formed in 2020 as part of Sustainable Chesham. The group aims to raise the profile of cycling on the on local authority agendas and to contribute to a Local Cycling and Walking Action Plan (LCWIP). Zone 9 have worked in partnership with Chesham Town Council to deliver a draft Chesham LCWIP, which has been made possible through funding from Buckinghamshire Council's Chesham & Villages Community Board and Chesham Town Council.



Local Groups and Projects

Colne Catchment Action Network (CAN)

CAN is a steering group, representing the public, private, charity and voluntary sector sectors. A number of different projects have been proposed along the river, including habitat enhancements and infrastructure improvements.

Chilterns Chalk Streams Project

2022 Marks the 25th Anniversary of the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project, and it remains a priority for the Chilterns Conservation Board alongside the Smarter Water Catchment work.



Local Groups and Projects

Chesham Renaissance Community Interest Company (CIC)

Chesham Renaissance is a community interest company. It aims to attract long term investment for the benefit of the town and the townspeople. One of the key objectives is the maintenance of Chesham's close physical links with the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and land designated as Green Belt.

Impress the Chess partnership

Impress the Chess is a partnership between local authorities, conservation bodies and community groups to protect and restore the River Chess, a chalk stream flowing through the town. The 2019 Impress the Chess Action Plan identifies future projects and actions along the length of the river in Chesham that will improve and protect the habitat for both wildlife and human enjoyment. Some are long-term goals, whereas others are more immediate projects. Many of these endeavors will require partnership working with landowners, councils and other organisations in order to be successful.



Design Guidance

Sustrans traffic-free routes and greenways design guide

The Sustrans traffic-free routes and greenways design guide provides detail on planning, design, construction and maintenance of new traffic-free routes and greenways. The guidance covers key principles relating to inclusive design, construction and maintenance. It also addresses land and legal issues, planning and consents, and ecology.



Department for Transport Local Transport Note (LTN) 1/20

Commonly referred to as LTN 1/20, this Department for Transport design guidance document was published in July 2020. It clearly sets out the current design standards for inclusive infrastructure in England, providing guidance on accessible design, network development and route selection. When applying for funding from the department for transport it is key that designs are compliant with LTN1/20.

The core principles of network design are:

- Coherent
- Direct
- Safe
- Comfortable
- Attractive

Paths for Everyone

Accessibility and the Equality Act 2010

Any person with characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010 has a right to unimpeded access public footpaths, bridleways and restricted byways in the UK. Protected characteristics in law are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The government offers guidance on access to public rights of way thus:

- **footpaths** - for walking, running, mobility scooters or powered wheelchairs
- **bridleways** - for walking, horse riding, bicycles, mobility scooters or powered wheelchairs
- **restricted byways** - for any transport without a motor and mobility scooters or powered wheelchairs
- **byways open to all traffic** - for any kind of transport, including cars (but they're mainly used by walkers, cyclists and horse riders)

The River Chess catchment is in need of more stile-free, well-surfaced trails suitable for walking and wheeling. When paths are designed to include wheelchair and other mobility aid users then we simultaneously provide access for stroller, buggy and pram users. We also know from research by charity Wheels for Wellbeing that 75% of disabled cyclists find cycling easier than walking. Whilst cycles, adapted or otherwise, are not yet recognised as mobility aids in law, where possible we should design paths for all types of mobility aid.



Data Review

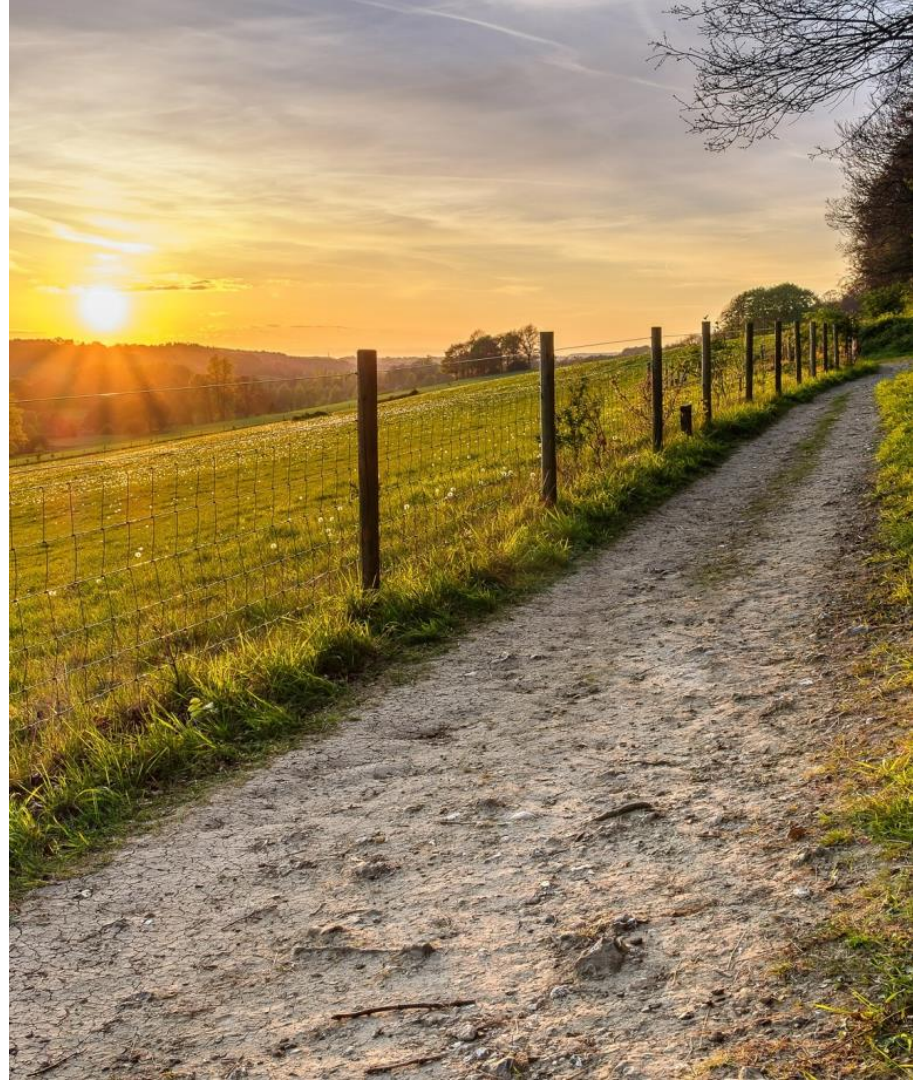
A desktop review of existing data



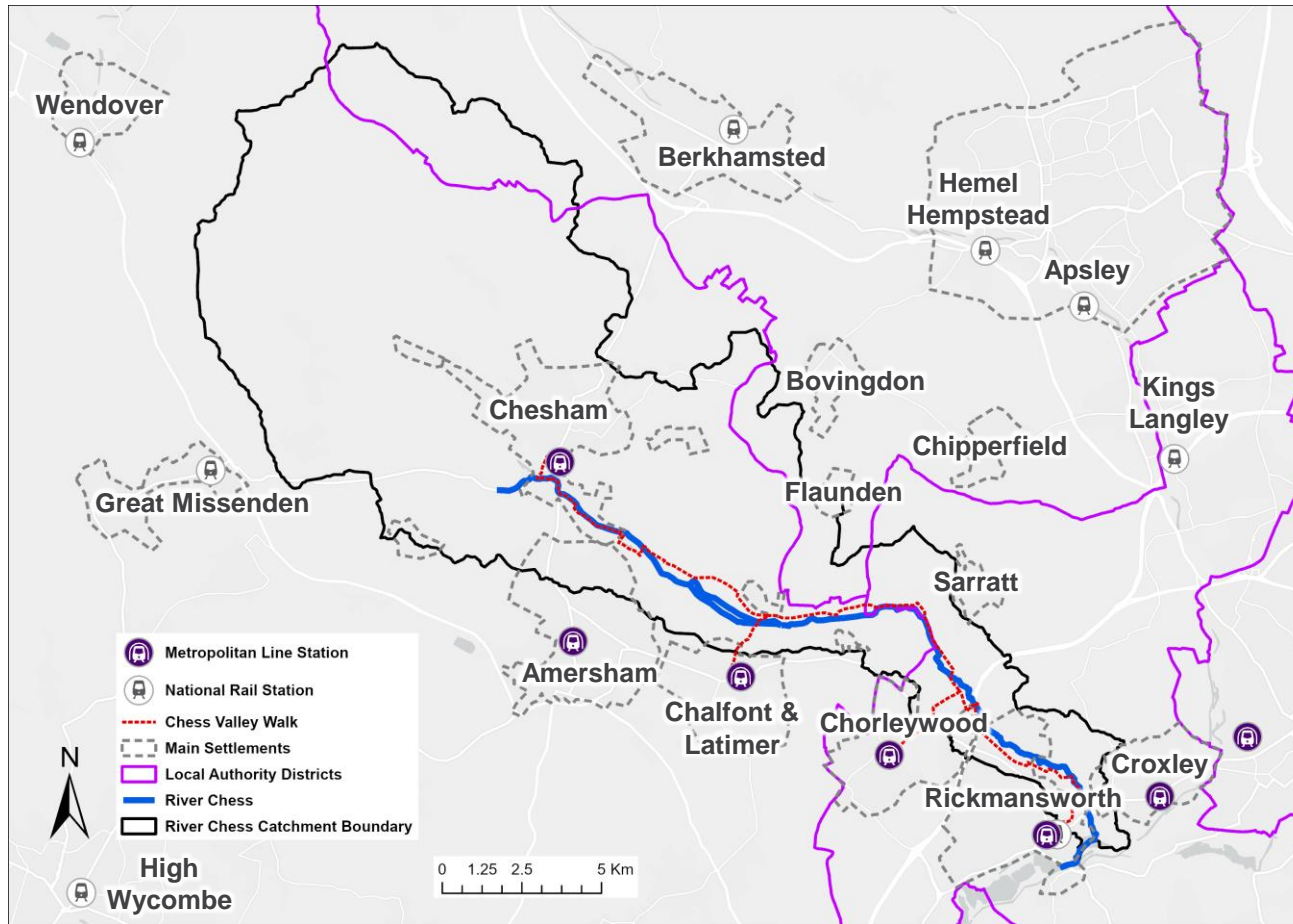
Existing GIS data

Following the review of supporting policy and local projects in the previous section of this document, an exercise in identifying and reviewing existing geospatial (GIS) data for the River Chess operational catchment was undertaken. The following data sets were identified:

- The operational catchment boundary, settlements and transport connections
- Administrative boundaries
- Public Rights of Way for Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire
- Some mapped leisure routes including the Chess Valley Walk
- Hubs i.e. locations with public toilets and other facilities
- Open spaces
- Indices of multiple deprivation data

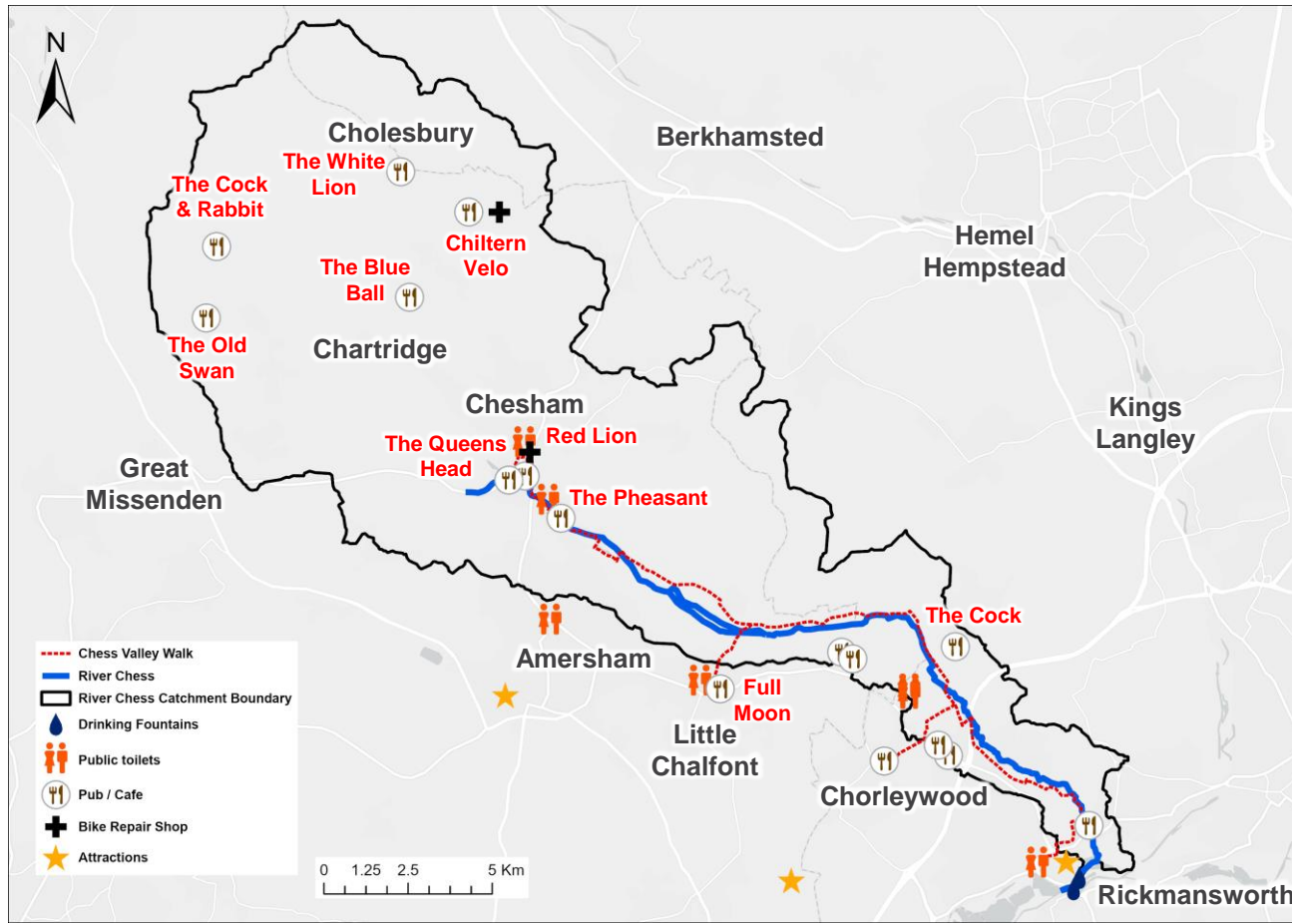


Settlements and transport connections



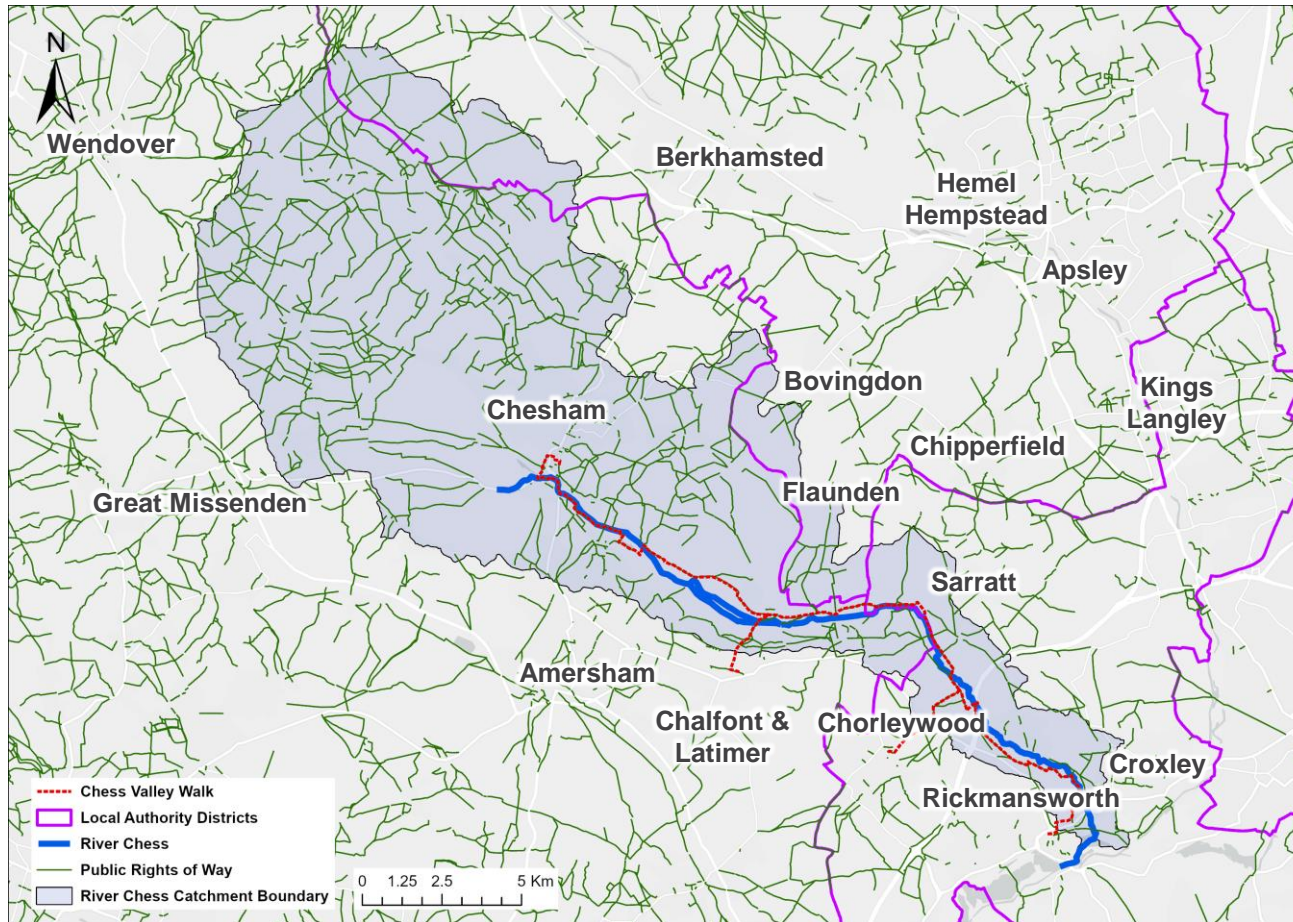
Amenities

Public toilets and pubs or cafes which may provide additional facilities



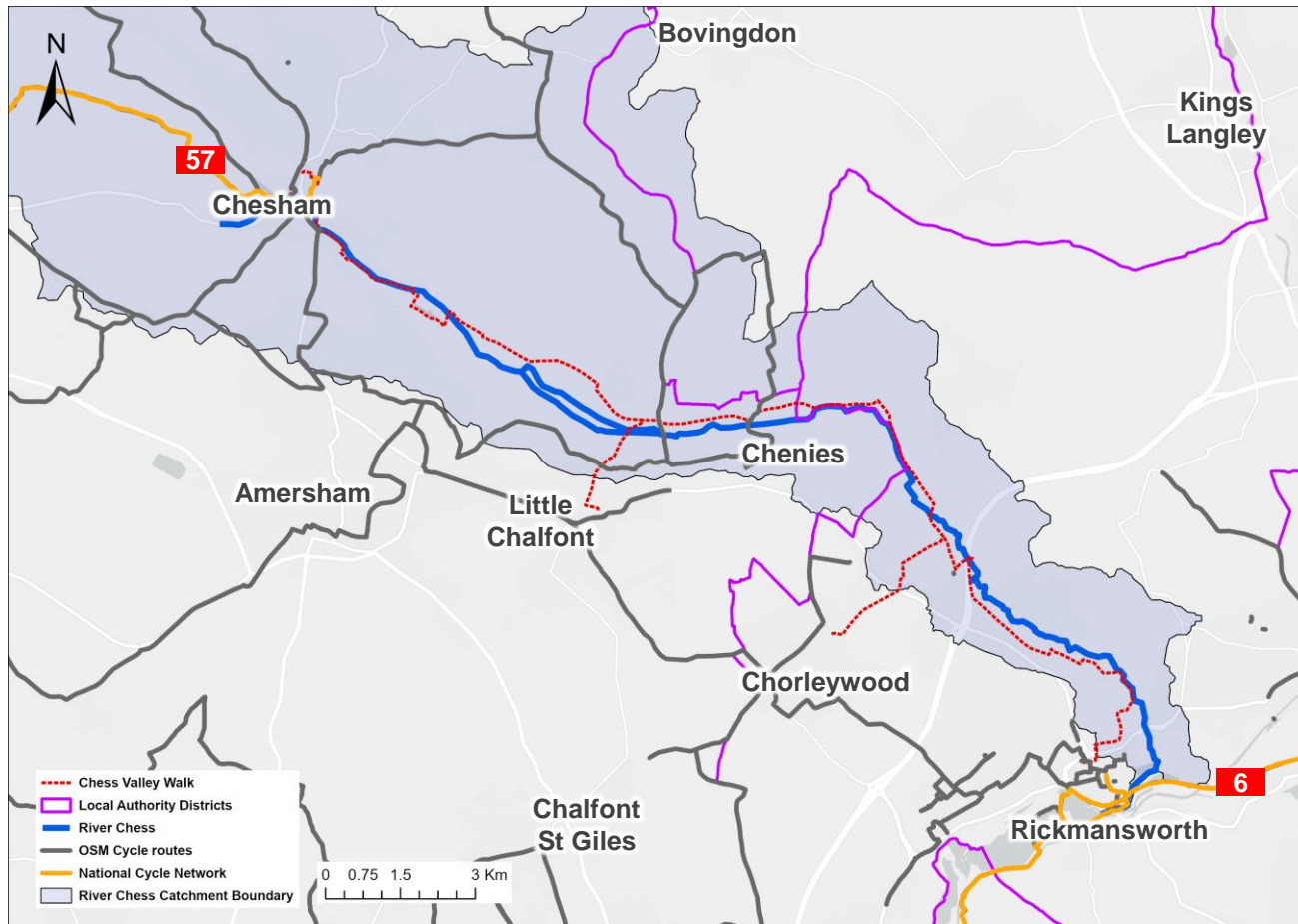
Paths and trails

The Chess Valley Walk and Public Rights of Way

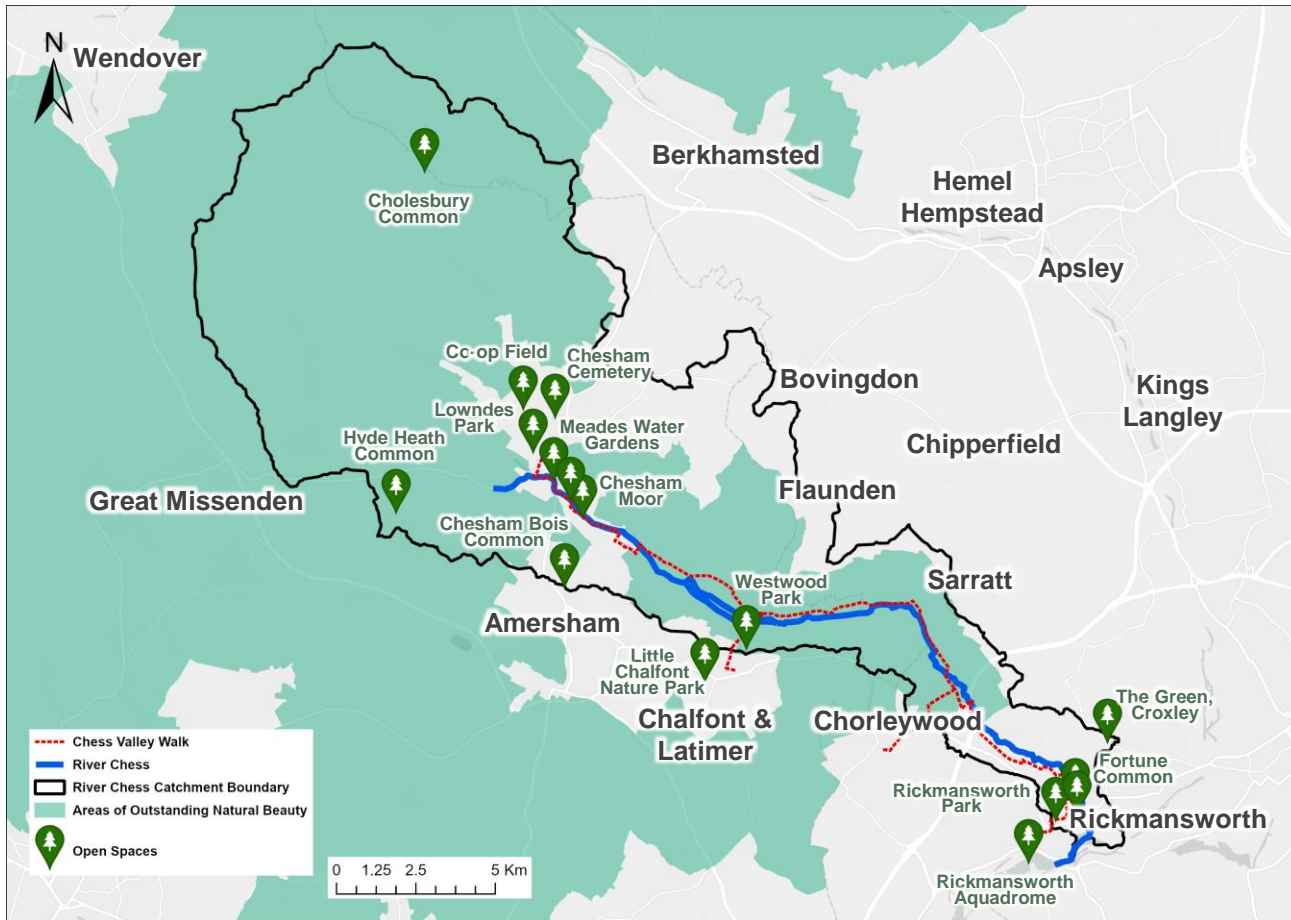


Routes for Cycling

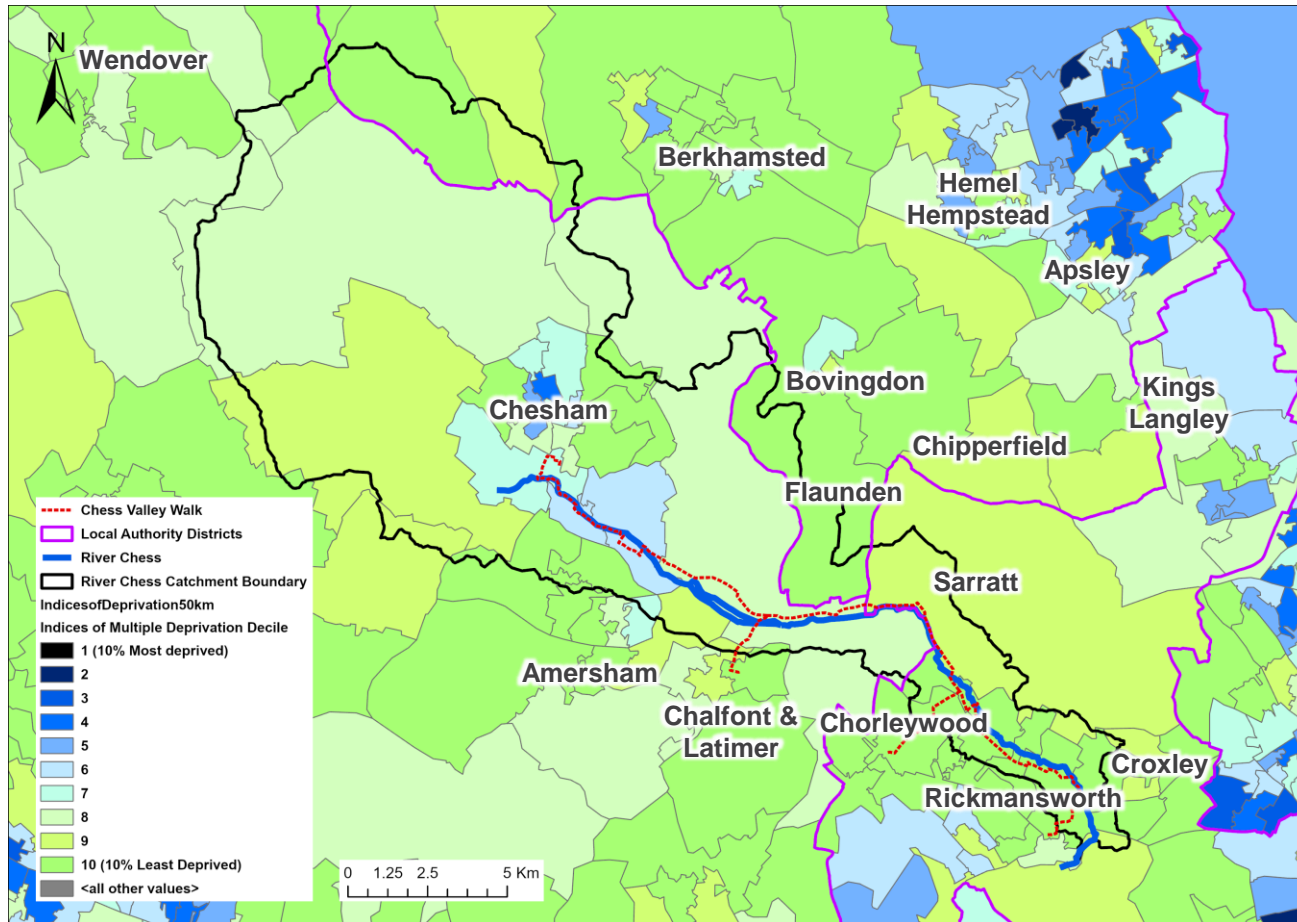
OSM Cycleways,
National Cycle Network



Open spaces and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Indices of Multiple Deprivation



Next Steps

Developing an Access Improvement Plan



An Improved Network

Subject to available funding, the next phase of work is to develop a **Access Improvement Plan** with a focus on route and location specific interventions. To support planning a comprehensive baseline of conditions for walking, wheeling and cycling should be established, including detailed path characteristics and identifying barriers that may exclude potential users. Through on-site geospatial (GIS) data gathering, a series of interventions and improvements would be compiled. This would be used to create a new and improved network of paths for the River Chess catchment.

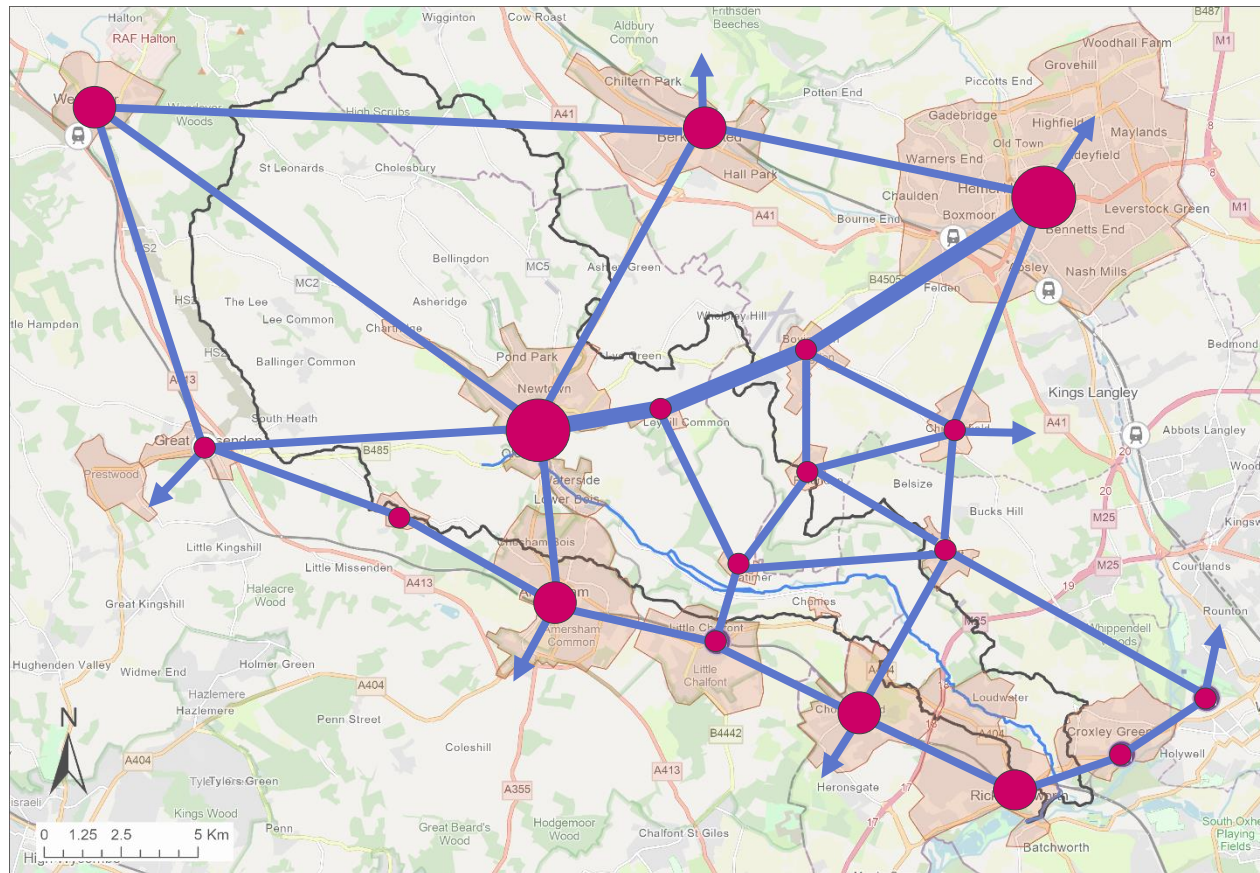


Access Improvements Plan process:

1. A **draft network plan** is devised through desktop analysis and then reviewed with key stakeholders
2. A series of site visits is planned to **gather detailed baseline data**
3. The network map is then reviewed and the **network plan is finalised**
4. Production of a **comprehensive schedule of improvements** required to deliver new and improved network
5. **Prioritise improvements** to help develop a phased programme for future investment
6. **Supplementary actions** will also be recommended e.g. producing an Engagement Plan

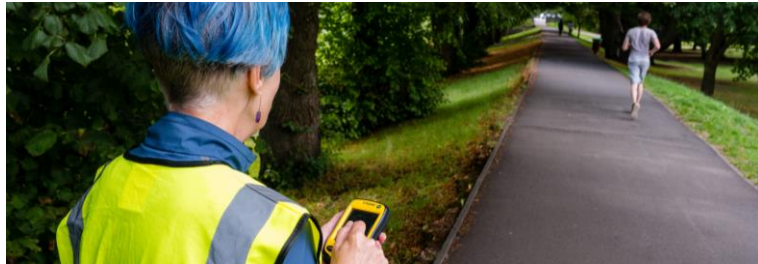
1. Developing the network

- Analysing trip origins, destinations and generators (existing and planned)
- Clarifying existing connections and focus areas
- Considering points of severance such as major roads and railways
- Convert flows into a network of routes and determine the type of improvements required



2. Gathering Baseline Data

Gathering the data required to effectively develop the **Access Improvement Plan** would be achieved through a series of sites visits and using a GIS data collection app running on a 4G mobile device. Each visit would be planned to cover a given route/s or area where the quality of existing provision for walking, cycling and wheeling would be physically assessed whilst identifying opportunities for improvement and highlighting critical severance such as excess motor traffic movements. Geotagged photographs would be captured and added to the GIS features in real time.

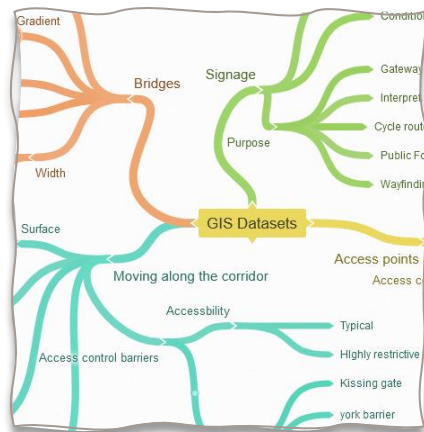


Data gathered should include the following:

- Status of all existing paths including width, nature of surfacing and condition
- Locations of all access control barriers including design and clearance measurements
- Existing signage and wayfinding
- All bridges and road crossings including design, accessibility and clearance measurements
- All catchment access points e.g. where users may enter the river corridor or notable greenspace

GIS data fields and attributes

This table gives examples of the GIS data fields and associated attributes that could be populated through site visits. The fields and attributes of each GIS 'layer' would be agreed at the inception of the Access Improvement Plan phase.



Catchment paths layer

- Surface
 - *Made, bound*
 - *Made, unbound*
 - *Unmade*
- Width
- Condition
 - *Good*
 - *Functional*
 - *Poor*
- PROW or permissive path

Catchment access points layer

- Minimum accessible width
- General accessibility level
- Design
 - *Gate*
 - *Kissing gate*
 - *Chicane*
 - *A-frame*
 - *K-frame*
- Surface condition

Signage & wayfinding layer

- Purpose
 - *Gateway location*
 - *Wayfinding/directions*
 - *Public footpath / bridleway*
 - *Cycle route*
 - *Interpretation panel*
 - *Named trail*
- Condition

Bridges & Severance layers

- Design
- Step-free access
- Width
- Surface type and condition
- Gradient accessibility
- Ownership

A Collaborative Approach

Recognising the immense expertise and local knowledge amongst key stakeholders, including volunteers, is essential in developing a meaningful and deliverable Access Improvement Plan. Key stakeholders should be engaged to review and feedback on progress at agreed milestones during the development of the plan. Key stakeholders may include:

- Chiltern Society officers and lead volunteers
- Local Authority Rights of Way Officers
- Chiltern Conservations Board officers and lead volunteers
- Other associated catchment area project leads



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