

# APPENDIX D

## Guidelines for Assessing Walking Routes

West Northants Council has a duty to promote sustainable travel and encouraging children to walk and cycle to school helps keep them healthy, improves mental wellbeing, eases congestion and reduces toxins in the air.

Children’s safety is paramount and our walking route criteria will seek to ensure that safety is not compromised when travelling to and from school. Walking routes will be assessed by carrying out desktop analysis and where necessary site visits and assessments will be undertaken so that routes children are expected to walk are safe.

### Parental Responsibility

- There is a general expectation that a child will be accompanied by a parent, carer or responsible adult where necessary, unless there is a good reason why it is not reasonable to expect them to do so. A route does not fail to qualify as safe because of dangers which would arise if the child were to be unaccompanied.
- Parents should ensure that a child has suitable clothing and equipment for the journey (for example, boots, wet weather clothing, reflective bands, and torch). Conditions such as muddy footpaths or lack of lighting do not mean that a route is unsafe, and it is expected that these issues can be overcome with suitable clothing and basic equipment.
- Where it would normally be expected that a child should be accompanied, and the parent or carer has a special educational need or disability that prevents them doing so, then transport may be provided. In these circumstances such a decision will not set a precedent for the route or mean that the route is deemed hazardous for other children who can be accompanied as necessary.

### The Council will take the following factors into account:

<b>We will consider:</b>
Road width, visibility and the severity of bends
Existence of 'safe refuge' including footpaths and verges, road markings at the side of the road
Existence of Rights of Way, Permitted Paths and Bridle Paths
Existence of canals, rivers and ditches which could pose a hazard
In the absence of a footway, verge, roadside strip, and/or formal crossing points along the route, the Council will consider: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The volume of traffic at the relevant period of day</li> <li>2. The type of traffic and its relative speed</li> <li>3. Difficulty of road crossings</li> <li>4. The accident record along the route</li> <li>5. Visibility between the pedestrian and oncoming vehicles.</li> </ol>
Nature of road (urban/rural) and driver expectation
The presence or otherwise of speed limits and other warning signs

<b>We will not consider:</b>
Isolation of route
Weather conditions
Transient events - road closures, construction work, seasonal weather (e.g., flooding, snow, ice)

Temporary surface conditions (e.g., mud, puddles)
Lack of street lighting
The presence of uncut hedges
Difficult terrain/arduousness of the route - steep hills are not a hazard

### Measurement of Route

- The measurement of the statutory walking distances is not necessarily the shortest distance by road. It is measured by the shortest route along which a child, accompanied as necessary, may walk safely, and this may include footpaths, bridleways, and other pathways, as well as recognised roads.

### Footpaths

- Where there is a footpath or roadside strip, the route will normally be considered suitable. A verge, which can be stepped onto, will also be regarded normally as rendering the route safe for walkers.

### Width of Road

- Even without a footpath, a road which is wider than 5.5 metres will normally be considered safe for walkers.
- A narrow road is not necessarily dangerous simply because it is narrow. If the width is less than 5.5 metres, traffic frequency and vehicle types will be considered.

### Road Crossing

- Where a route involves crossing a road, the route will normally be considered acceptable where official crossing points are provided.
- In other cases, traffic flow, vehicle speed, road width and visibility in both directions will be considered.

### Traffic Frequency

- The traffic frequency at the beginning and end of the school day is the relevant traffic frequency. This is likely to be the busiest period.
- Where a route or part of a route does not have a footway, traffic frequency will be considered together with the composition of the traffic, the width of the road and the provision of refuges for walkers.
- In the absence of a formal crossing point, where the two-way (one way of a dual carriageway) traffic flow is below 240 vehicles per hour the road is assessed as safe to cross. This is based on the original County Road Safety Officers Association criteria and is equivalent to 1 vehicle every 15 seconds and allows a reasonable gap time to cross a 7m wide road at a walking speed of 3ft per second. If the site assessment shows that the traffic flow is more than the above, and limits the opportunity to cross, then a gap count may be undertaken.

### Appeals

Parent or carers will be entitled to appeal against the decision of the Council on grounds of the suitability of the walking route. Where a parent or carer appeals our decision, the route will be assessed by an independent road safety specialist.