

Developing directional walking route signage for your local community:

A toolbox guide.

May 2023



Use of this Toolbox

This toolbox has been created to help community groups establish their own directional walking route signage within their local greenspaces.

To track the reach of this toolbox, the authors would be grateful if you could provide details of how you have used the toolbox to increase the use of greenspaces within your local community.

Please send any correspondence to Dr Declan Ryan with 'Walking Route Toolbox' as the Subject Header.

E: Declan.Ryan@northampton.ac.uk

If you are referring to the Toolbox within a document, website, or presentation then we would recommend the following reference:

Ryan, D.J., Hardwicke, J., Hill, K. M., Brown, J., and Clinton, R. (2023). Developing directional walking route signage for your local community: A toolbox guide. University of Northampton.

Contents

1. The local need

2. Opportunities to listen to the local community in this project

3. Identifying a route

4. Directional signage design

5. How community voice is being used

1.

The local need

Reasons for the project

International, national, and local government agencies want to increase the use of greenspaces, such as parks, to help improve the health and well-being of local communities.

Lack of knowledge about local greenspaces can prevent people from visiting these places.

Signposted walking routes may help people who don't visit greenspaces regularly, to start visiting more often.

Therefore, signposted walking routes may help improve peoples' health and well-being by helping them explore their local greenspaces.

We have seen locally that people want support to explore their local greenspaces.

For example, Northamptonshire Walks, by Dave Askew, had half a million webpage views in 2020.

NORTHAMPTON Chronicle & ECHO

By Megan Hillery
21st May 2021



Dave set up the 'Northamptonshire Walks' website and Facebook page in 2014 after having an honest conversation with his daughter, Emily, about his mental health. She told him to go out, take some pictures and start a blog.

In the 2020, the Facebook page's popularity soared **from 1,500 followers to over 25,000** and the website, which lists over 150 walks in Northamptonshire, recorded over half a million visitors in 2020.

Image: News article clipping about Northamptonshire Walks. Credit: Northampton Chronicle & Echo.

What we did in the project

Before the project, there were only a couple of information boards that provided an artistic map of Delapré Park.

Between 2021 – 2022, the University of Northampton worked with Delapré Abbey Preservation Trust and Northamptonshire Sport to install a signposted walking route within Delapré Park.

The walking route used 24 signs to direct people along a 3km route through the park's most popular places, such as Charterwood, the lake, the Abbey, and the historical battlefield.

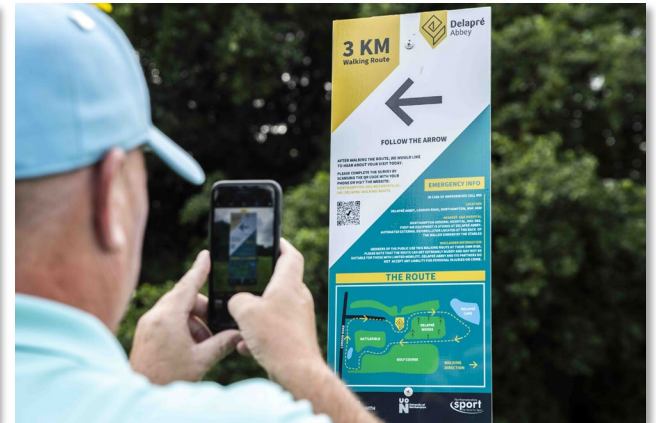
Top image: Dr Declan Ryan and Dave Askew open the new walking route.

Left image: A picture of one of the new directional signposts.

Middle image: Northamptonshire Walks group walking the route for the first time.

Right image: Person taking a photo of one of the new signposts.

Credit: Kirsty Edmonds.



2.

Opportunities to listen to the local community in this project

Listening to the community

At the start of the project, we did a public survey that asked people what benefits the signposted walking route could bring and what information should be put on the new signs. This was completed by 266 people from the Northampton(shire) area.

During the project, we monitored how many people used the paths along the signposted walking route and had an online survey that could be filled-in after people used the route, which was completed by 27 people.

We then did intercept 'go-along' interviews with 30 people who were visiting Delapré Park to ask them about why they visit the park, how it impacts their well-being, and what they thought about the signposted walking route.

The following pages summarise the main learnings from the project.

Public Survey
Feb – May 2021



Baseline Monitoring
May – August 2021



Installation of Signs & First Follow-up Monitoring
September - December 2021



Second Follow-up Monitoring
May – August 2022



'Go-along' Interviews
September 2022



3.

Identifying a route

Identifying a route

The Delapré Walking route

The route for the signposted walk was identified through consultation with relevant stakeholders of Delapré Park, including Delapré Abbey Preservation Trust and Northamptonshire Sport.

The distance was chosen to allow for an accessible distance for a range of population groups and was purposely designed to pass through the park's most popular places, such as Charterwood, the lake, the Abbey, and the historical battlefield.

A looped route was used to allow people to join the route at any point as there were multiple ways to enter the park.

Things to consider based on this project

Through the evaluation of the walking route in this project, there were a number of findings to consider in the future when identifying a suitable route within a greenspace.

- Variety was highlighted as an important factor, particularly for regular visitors and dog walkers. Here, future directional signpost projects may consider multiple walking routes with a range of distances and terrains, which visitors can engage with to suit their needs.
- Distance markers were highlighted as a useful feature to provide confidence to route users that may have mobility impairments.
- Ensuring a route passes through key attractions and amenities in the space, particularly plenty of benches along the route.
- Perceptions of safety were important, with route users suggesting they may avoid certain areas due to safety concerns. This is important information to assess to ensure planned routes do not use areas in which park visitors feel unsafe.
- Much of the above can be achieved through understanding local context and engaging with the local community.

4.

Directional signage design

What to include on a directional signpost

Using online surveys and 'go-along' interviews, we found that the local community want the following information included on directional signposts.

The public survey at the beginning of the project said that directional signposts should include:

- Directional arrows
- Total distance of the route
- Consistent colours and fonts
- A map of the route
- Local information of interest, such as wildlife to look for
- Emergency contact information, such as closest hospital or the address of the park
- Avoid any suggestions of competition, such as step counts, average time to complete the route, or encouraging quotes

During the project, people suggested that these items should be added to the signs:

- The location of benches
- Accessible footpaths and barriers, such as stiles or gates
- 'You are here' markers

Seating is important for walking

"This is one of the longer walks we're doing today and there is that seat there, there's not another chance now until we get all the way back to the walled garden. You are kind of committed to do that walk."

Distance markers help people choose a route

"(I am) more likely to walk a route knowing how far it is and the time it would take beforehand. Otherwise, may just wonder around keeping close to car/home/the familiar."

People want to know the surface of the footpath

"Knowing the sort of terrain you are walking on is really helpful if you have additional needs. I've sometimes had to turn back due to stiles which weren't marked on a map or walk leaflet."

Consider language, font sizes, and other forms of communication

"It would be inclusive to consider directional signposting use for visually impaired walkers & runners. Not everyone who wants to be active has the same level of sight."

How to make a directional signpost

Within the online survey and 'go-along' interviews people said that greenspaces provided an escape from urban environments. Reminders of the urban environment within greenspaces would impact on people's ability to remove themselves from urban life.

Therefore, directional signposts should be designed so they are in-keeping with the natural environment.

This could be done by:

- Using wooden signposts
- Making sure signposts do not get in the way of existing footpaths or sight-lines
- Give signposts a dual-purpose, like providing 'bug hotels'

Sign positioning and placement is key

"Signposts should not disturb the landscape they are installed in. E.g not blight the beauty of the area."

Make signs look natural

"When you come for a walk like this you want to get into the fresh air, trees, grass. You don't want to see that urban environment particularly. pylons...city and developed life - it's nice to be away from that."

The value of greenspace to the community

Broader findings from speaking in-depth with park visitors during the 'go-along' interviews included:

- The greenspace was highly valued by the local community and provided a range of positive influences for health and well-being.
- There was a strong sense of community within the park, which created a positive social environment that encouraged use.
- Many park users had an emotional investment in the space, as well as a sense of community ownership over the park.
- Facilities and staff 'presence' were highlighted as important features that encourage use of the park.

Greenspaces as mental health resources

"I have suffered with depression and this was my happy place then. I would come after work, have a walk round and just decompress from the day. It's very important to have those spaces."

Community ownership

"...there's a deep vein of people who've been coming here for years...20 years...like me in [local parish], and anybody who's grown up and lived in [local parish] will know of this place and will have been here on a regular basis. It's not unknown to the community."

Emotional investments in the space

"So mental health-wise it's massive for me. This is my little sanctuary."

Delapré Park footfall

Between May to August 2021, before the signs were installed, footfall across the six monitored footpaths ranged from a median 20 people per day (counter location: 5) to 282 people per day (counter location: 6).

Between August 2021 to February 2022, the winter after the signs were installed, footfall across the six monitored footpaths ranged from a median 26 people per day (counter location: 5) to 212 people per day (counter location: 6). Footfall generally dropped across all monitored footpaths, which evidenced the impact of the winter weather on the footpaths.

Between March to August 2022, the summer after the signs were installed, footfall across the six monitored footpaths ranged from a median 27 people per day (counter location: 5) to 263 people per day (counter location: 6).

Overall, footpath use did not increase following the installation of the new signposted walking route. However, during the summer 2022 in-person monitoring, 23% of footpath users said they were following the new signposted walking route.

Although there was no change in footfall by installing a signposted walking route, the new signs were helping people explore the park.

The people following the new signposted walking route were likely new or infrequent visitors to the park (60% of intercept survey respondents).

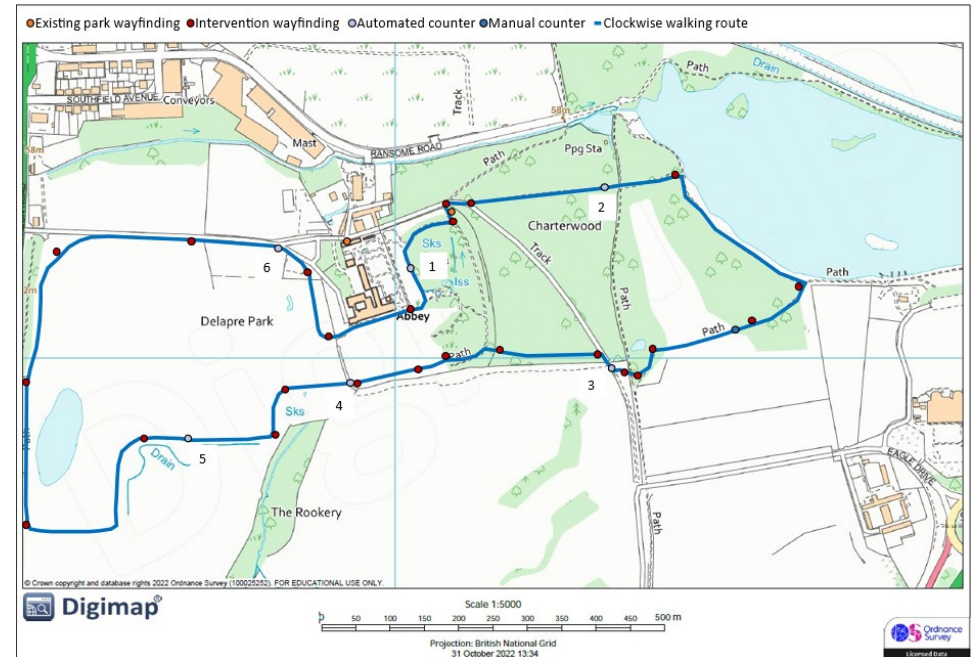


Figure: Map of the walking route, sign location, and counter locations.

Intercept survey responses:

"This [the signposted walking route] has enabled me to safely walk around an area I'm unfamiliar with."

"Easier to navigate for first timers like me."

"Beautiful morning walk had today... This is my first guided walk, good and clear markings, will definitely do this again. Well done."

"It'll encourage more people who are unsure about walking in some public places."

Local community responses to the signposted walking route

Overall responses to the signposted walking route were positive and the local community who we spoke to were mostly supportive of the project.

The public survey at the start of the project found that 33% and 41% of people 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that directional signposts should be installed in public parks and footpaths.

When speaking with park users during the 'go-along' interviews, we found that park users were positively receptive to the new directional signposts.

Based on the findings from across the project, it is suggested that directional signpost projects are beneficial for people who do not visit parks frequently.

However, it is important to consult with the local community about new directional signpost projects so you can listen to their ideas to improve the local greenspace and understand any concerns so you can take steps to minimise these concerns.



Image: Visitors gathering before the walking route opening. Credit: Kirsty Edmonds.

5.

How community voice is being used

Action

The findings from this project have been valuable to Delapré Abbey Preservation Trust and West Northamptonshire Council.

These organisations have used the community voice and observations from this project to identify that footpath surfaces and directional signposts need to be improved in Delapré Park, as many of the paths are unusable after heavy rainfall.

The findings of this project are being shared with officers within West and North Northamptonshire unitary authorities to help them shape their parks, open spaces, and public health strategies, as well as securing external funding for greenspace projects.

The findings of the project have been used by the 'Friends of Eastfield Park' and Northamptonshire Sport to help them create their own signposted walking route.

This project is being used by the Active Quarter Partnership to explore how directional signposts can be improved across the different areas of the Active Quarter in Northampton.



Next Steps

We will continue to do research in Northamptonshire to understand and share how greenspaces can be improved to improve accessibility for all residents, as part of the Active Quarter Research and Insight Development team.

Please keep an eye out for new opportunities to be involved in research.

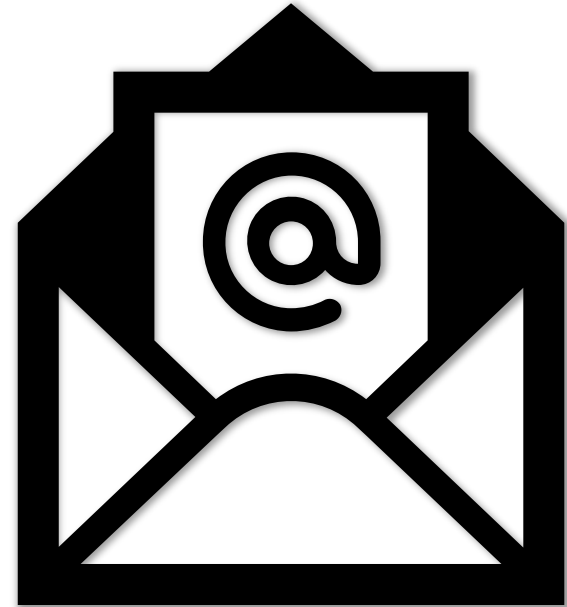
If you have an idea for something that needs to be researched, then get in touch to see how we can make it a reality.

Contact:

Dr Declan Ryan

E: Declan.Ryan@northampton.ac.uk

Subject Heading: 'Greenspace Research Idea'



Contributors

Authors

- Dr Declan Ryan – University of Northampton
- Dr Jack Hardwicke – University of Northampton
- Dr Kimberley Hill – University of Northampton
- Jackie Browne – Northamptonshire Sport
- Richard Clinton – Delapré Abbey Preservation Trust

The authors would like to acknowledge the contributions of the following people to this project:

- Peter Hackett (West Northamptonshire Council)
- Peter Boddington (Delapré Abbey Preservation Trust)
- Aimee Holmes (Delapré Abbey Preservation Trust)
- and all the local communities who took the time to complete our online surveys or participate in 'go-along' interviews.

About the organisations

The University of Northampton is an Ashoka Changemaker University aiming to create societal impact through their local, national, and global research.

Delapré Abbey Preservation Trust is a charitable organisation who maintain the heritage site, Delapré Abbey, in the heart of Northampton to support community development and well-being.

Northamptonshire Sport is the local Active Partnership who are responsible for enhancing the Sport and Physical Activity offer within the county to improve health and well-being.



Notes

A series of horizontal lines for writing notes, bounded by a vertical line on the left.

