

Walking and cycling¹ manifesto for Somerset

Somerset Climate Action Network has recommended that the five principal authorities in Somerset ‘Remove barriers and lead joint funding bids to plan and develop effective cycling and walking infrastructure in all Somerset towns and key rural locations’. We very much welcome recent steps by the County Council to give greater focus to walking and cycling and the government’s recent announcements.

This manifesto sets out its signatories’ requests of the County Council as Highway Authority.

Policy

1. Reverse the nationally prevalent prioritisation, which puts predicting and providing for cars first, with pedestrians, cyclists and those with limited mobility a distant second².
2. Stop all investment based on ‘predict and provide’. To address long-standing historical imbalances future expenditure on Highways should normally be for maintenance and safety improvements only.
3. Establish a specific and substantial budget with a named officer at Assistant Director level to champion the development of walking and cycling networks across the County.
4. Adopt current best-practice guidance as standard policy:
 - a. Manual for Streets Vols 1 and 2
 - b. The LTN 1/19 Cycle Infrastructure Design Guidance.
5. The County Council does not have the granular local knowledge to plan, control and manage everything that needs to be done. Having set the appropriate standards, the Council should devolve elements of decision-making and public engagement to District and Local Councils and community organisations.
6. Highways’ advice to Planning Authorities should be consistent with this Manifesto. For any new development, walking and cycling connectivity with local facilities should be considered first, and s106 contributions sought to ensure connectivity is delivered to an appropriate standard. If a proposed development does not or cannot deliver this, its refusal should be recommended.

¹ The Manifesto refers to ‘Walking and Cycling’ for brevity, but references to walking and cycling should always be taken to include those with limited mobility, e-bike users and, in rural and recreational contexts, to horse-riders.

² A recent Fol request showed that SCC’s capital expenditure on new roads was £47M in 2018-19, with £116,000 spent on cycle infrastructure. This is an extreme example, but in the years 2017-19 for every £1 of capital expenditure on walking and cycling infrastructure more than £13 was spent on infrastructure for motor vehicles.

Detail

1. Establish a standard for routes between settlements, which will include use of regulatory measures for minor unclassified roads, upgrading of some existing public rights of way to multi-user route standards, and adoption of the Knooppunten³ or similar system for wayfinding.
2. Promote the connection by safe cycle routes of all settlements in Somerset of over 1,500 population. The actual routes should be agreed by all the local councils through which the route passes and/or the local District Council.
3. Ensure that all housing within towns and villages is within 400m of good-quality infrastructure, (which might include designated low-traffic neighbourhoods).
4. Prohibit pavement parking across the County (except in designated locations agreed with local communities).
5. Introduce a presumption in favour of 20 mph limits within all built-up areas.

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³ The proven Knooppunten system numbers junctions rather than routes, and is in use throughout the Netherlands, Belgium and much of northern France. It is to be adopted as part of Greater Manchester's Bee Network.