

North Somerset Council

Rural Lanes Action Plan

Active Travel Action Plans 2023-30

One of our seven Active Travel Action Plans (ATAPs) for 2023-30 to help deliver our Active Travel Strategy's vision, to:

'Make walking and cycling the natural choice for a cleaner, healthier and more active North Somerset'

Plan statement: This **Rural Lanes Action Plan** will help build a network of 'rural lanes' with improved safety through a 'share with care' approach and lower speeds to help protect our rural areas, support safer active travel movements, providing improved links between our urban areas and helping to boost the connectivity of rural settlements – particularly where active travel infrastructure is impractical. This will make local journeys safer for all, more attractive and help increase rural tourism.



What is Active Travel?

Active Travel refers to the movement of people or goods by using the physical activity of a person for movement. In this Active Travel Action Plan, active travel refers mostly to the most popular forms of active travel – walking/wheeling and cycling – but also includes (and is not limited to) other active options such as running and scooting.

What are Rural Lanes?

Rural Lanes are local access roads in rural areas of North Somerset. Although some rural lanes are attractive alternatives to congested routes, these lanes generally have much lower levels of traffic than Neighbourhood Distributors or Primary Routes. Rural lanes can be attractive to people walking/wheeling, equestrians and people cycling. The Rural network of lanes can often form part of National Cycle Routes or local waymarked cycle routes and facilitates short links between Public Rights of Way.

Equalities impact assessment

North Somerset Council (NSC) welcomes its Equality Act 2010 responsibilities and is committed to meeting them. Our activities are consistent with the council's Corporate Plan vision of an Open, Fair and Green authority and our **Equalities Policy**.

Our Place and Movement Framework and Active Travel Action Plans are consistent with central government Levelling Up priorities by building capability to deliver an inclusive active travel network. All the plans included are about bettering travel choice for all our local residents and include provisions, such as more level pedestrian crossings, tactile paving and removing barriers to travel, particularly for the elderly, disabled, those with mobility issues or people who are visually impaired.

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1. Policy context

Active Travel as a local priority

The **North Somerset Corporate Plan (2020-24)** aims to create an Open, Fair and Green North Somerset with the council being a local leader and the area's largest employer. For transport specifically, the West of England **Joint Local Transport Plan 4 (JLTP4)**, adopted by North Somerset Council and its West of England neighbouring authorities in March 2020, sets out to:

- Take action against climate change and address poor air quality;
- Support sustainable and inclusive economic growth;
- Enable equality and improve accessibility;
- Contribute to better health, wellbeing, safety and security;
- Create better places.

To help make this a reality, the **North Somerset Active Travel Strategy** (adopted in July 2021) sets the policy background to accelerate North Somerset Council's efforts over the next ten years to 'make walking and cycling the natural choice for a cleaner, healthier and more active North Somerset'.

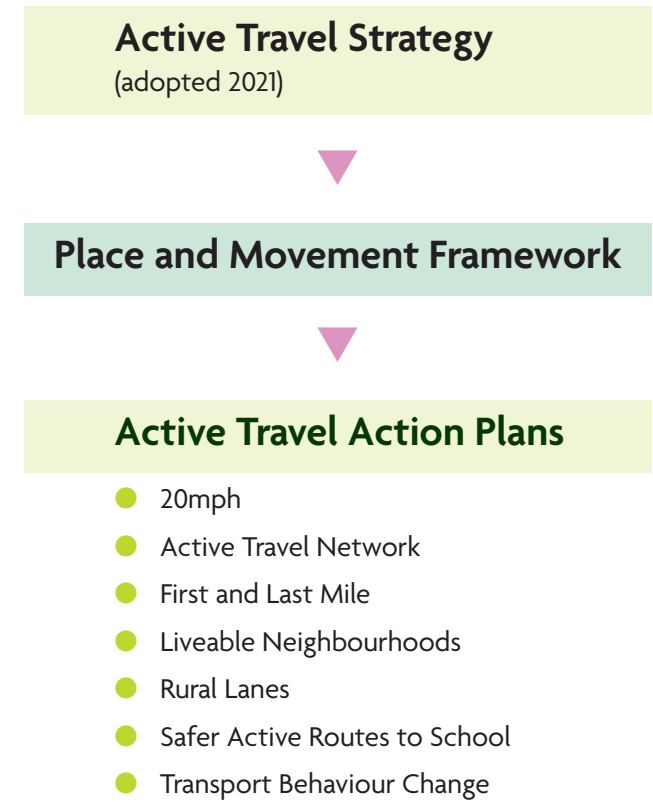
The strategy aims to achieve a number of benefits locally including:

- safe and frequent active travel to improve public health;
- reduce carbon emissions and improve air quality;
- support the local economy;
- help grow more 'liveable neighbourhoods' with our communities and through the planning system.

The Strategy's key target is to increase walking and cycling trips by 300% by 2030.

On adopting the Strategy, North Somerset Council's Executive Committee set out that a **series of action plans would be developed and adopted** to help us make our Active Travel Strategy commitments and interventions a reality, as shown in the diagram below.

Figure 1: The North Somerset Council active travel policy framework.



The seven Active Travel Action Plans show the areas of focus for our active travel interventions, to help the council and North Somerset residents, businesses and visitors to choose active travel as the natural choice for the shorter and medium length journeys, and as the first and last mile of longer journeys.

This is part of the council's response to the Climate Emergency, the cost of living crisis and the health emergency by enhancing our transport network for cleaner, cheaper and healthier transport choices.

Plan statement: This **Rural Lanes Action Plan** will help build a network of 'rural lanes' with improved safety through a 'share with care' approach and lower speeds to help protect our rural areas, support safer active travel movements, providing improved links between our urban areas and helping to boost the connectivity of rural settlements – particularly where active travel infrastructure is impractical. This will make local journeys safer for all, more attractive and help increase rural tourism.

Regional strategy

At a regional level, the Western Gateway Sub-National Transport Body: **Rural Mobility Strategy** sets out how we can improve rural mobility in the future. This strategy includes the following objectives which are most relevant to the Rural Lanes Action Plan:

- Reduce the number and length of journeys, increase the efficiency of mobility and decarbonise transport in rural areas to support net zero targets.
- Increase local access within rural areas including to employment, education, healthcare, retail, services, leisure and neighbouring communities.
- Strengthen integration between rural mobility and strategic connections to support access to community and economic needs beyond local areas.

“Around 17% of the English population live in rural areas and in the South West that figure is 33%. However, despite a sizeable population, many of its countryside and coastal communities are being significantly impacted by a reduction in public transport services, leading to an inevitable high dependency on private cars.

While some areas in the South West are very affluent, others suffer from significant economic challenges compounded by rising fuel costs. The dominance of private cars is also making it difficult to meet net-zero carbon targets, particularly when people have to drive further to reach employment, education, healthcare or even just to do their weekly shop.”

(Western Gateway Sub National Transport Body – Rural Mobility Strategy)

In terms of measures suggested by the Rural Mobility Strategy, development of a Quiet Lanes Network is most relevant to this action plan. It suggests establishing a network of 'quiet lanes' with reduced traffic flows and speeds to support active travel movements, particularly where purposely built active travel infrastructure is impractical. Also identified are active travel infrastructure, road safety improvements and 30-minute rural communities which form a part of this action plan.

National refocus on Active Travel

Since the launch of central government's **Gear Change: A bold vision for cycling and walking** in July 2020, we have seen an increase in priority of active travel within the national transport agenda. With new strategies, funding opportunities and even a new national agency, active travel is quickly becoming a serious priority for national government's transport agenda and a material requirement for local authorities across the country:

- The Department for Transport's **Decarbonising Transport** plan to 2050, with the top Strategic Priority being 'Accelerating modal shift to public and active transport' so that they 'will be the natural first choice for our daily activities';
- **Gear Change** and **Local Transport Note (LTN 1/20)** setting much higher standards for active travel infrastructure;
- **Active Travel England** are the new government agency with responsibility for assessing and allocating all active travel funding bids for national funding, but also have statutory planning consultee and other support functions, as well as hosting regular local authority self-assessments, to measure authorities' ability to plan and deliver active travel networks;
- **Local Authority Toolkits** – supporting local authorities to promote active travel in their areas;
- **A Moment of Change** – guidance for local authorities to promote an active return to work (following the pandemic and associated lockdowns/homeworking).
- CWIS2 – national government's second **Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy** – including the target of 46% of journeys within towns and cities to be walked by 2025 (from 41% in 2018-19);
- **Active Travel Funds 2 and 3** – dedicated funding for active travel enhancement schemes.
- Capability and Ambition Fund – national government revenue funding for local authorities to build their 'capability' to plan and deliver active travel networks
- Local Transport Plan (LTP) guidance is being updated (due to be announced early 2023) and future funding likely to be tied to a decarbonising approach to transport planning and delivery;
- New Manual for Streets 3 expected soon (design guidance for new developments);
- The above, and our emerging North Somerset active travel design guidance (through our Place and Movement Framework – see section 2), will feed into a revised North Somerset Highway Development Design Guide (HDDG), for developers and any other external and internal stakeholders planning changes to the transport and highways network.

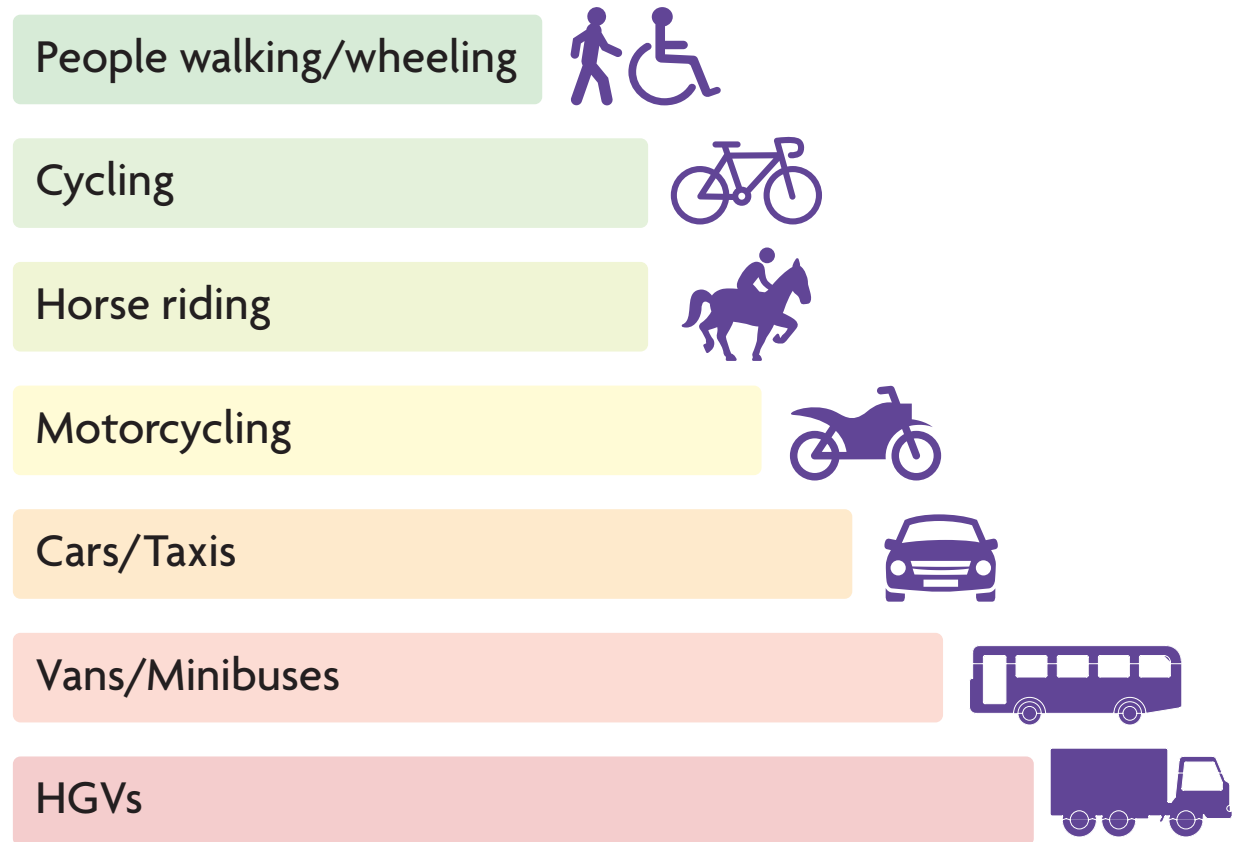
Hierarchy of road users

All interventions we pursue will reflect the **recently updated Highway Code's hierarchy of road users**, which places the onus on larger, faster and heavier vehicles to take extra care around those that are at greater risk in the event of a collision.

Local Freight Network

A Freight Network helps to remove Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) from rural villages and roads which are not suitable. Any future Freight Network Review or Action Plan will be developed in consistency with this Rural Lanes Action Plan. An example can be found from **West Sussex**.

Figure 2: New road safety hierarchy of road users



Road users with the potential to cause the most harm – such as those in large vehicles – have more responsibility to reduce the threat to others (in consistency with updated Highway Code, January 2022).

2. Policy approach

Active Travel Strategy

Guiding principles:

- Expand 40mph limits on minor rural roads to make our roads and streets safer for everyone.
- We will work with local communities and stakeholders to understand the specific local barriers to increasing active travel take-up in rural and deprived areas.
- We will increase active travel investment in or linking to rural and deprived areas of North Somerset to level up on health inequalities across the district.
- We will promote the awareness and take-up of electric bikes for hills, longer distances and into our more rural areas where conventional cycling is more difficult.

Local Plan

Large housing and employment developments must seek to minimise their impact on nearby rural lanes in order to help maintain their special character and facilitate leisure and utility trips of the new residents by walking/wheeling and cycling. In allocating housing and employment locations the Local Plan must also set out the impacts of those allocations and the required mitigations to overcome the impacts. These mitigations must be set out in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan that accompanies the Local Plan. It is anticipated at Wolverhill, Yanley and Nailsea/Backwell mitigations will be required on the surrounding local lanes networks.



Place and Movement Framework

Every single road, street, and lane in North Somerset will have both a **Place** and a **Movement** category, giving it one overall **classification**.

The three **Place** categories are:

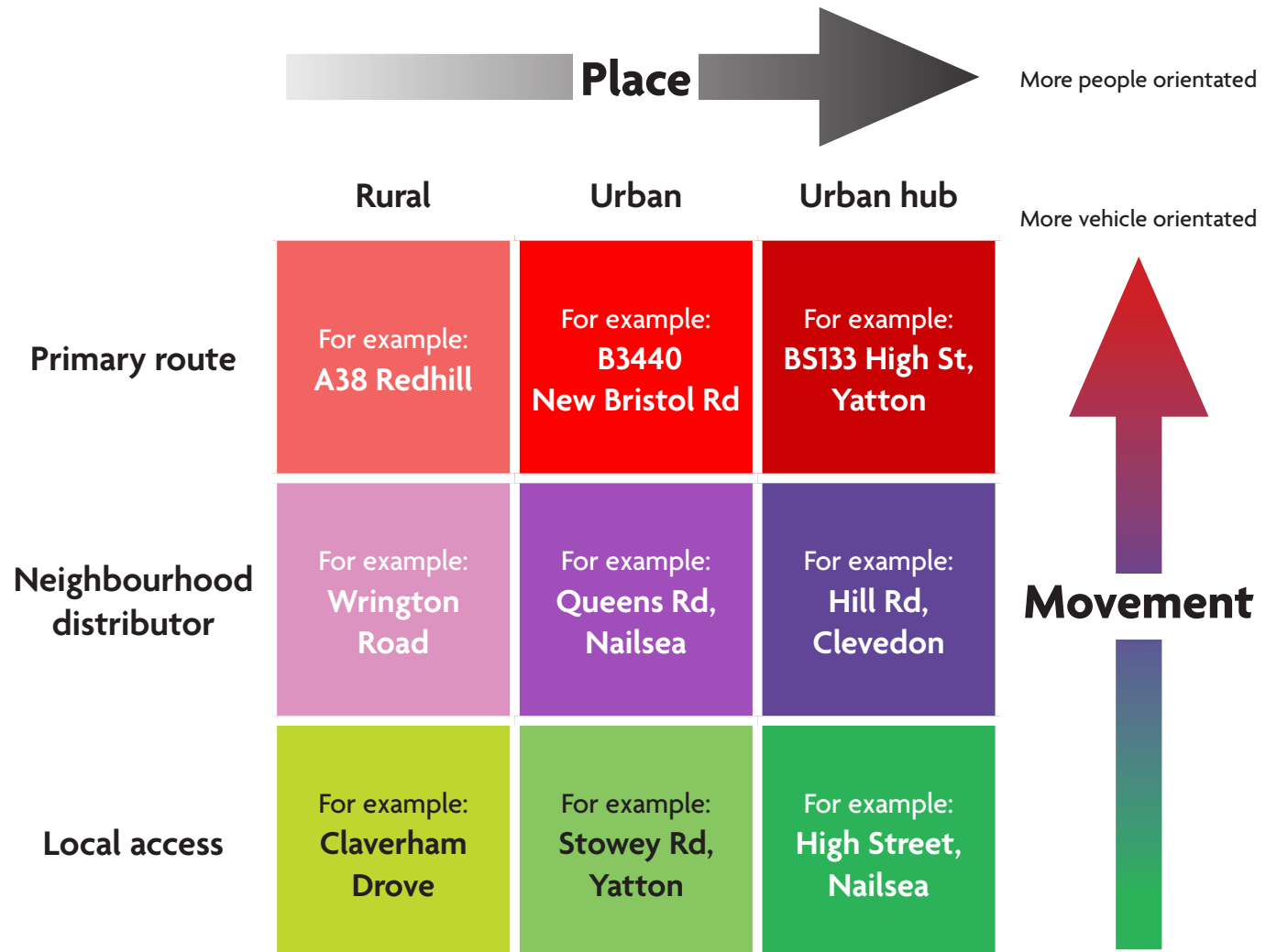
- Rural
- Urban
- Urban hub

The three **Movement** categories are:

- Primary route
- Neighbourhood distributor
- Local access

We are working on design guidance for each of these nine classifications. Each of the nine classifications' design codes will have a context checklist to ensure we factor in all needs for the transport space, such as whether it is a frequent bus corridor or whether it on the National Cycle Network, as well as other important considerations for auditing and design.

Figure 3: Place and Movement Framework classifications for every road, street, lane in North Somerset (with examples). This includes three 'Place' categories (Urban hub, Urban and Rural) and three 'Movement' categories ('Primary route', 'Neighbourhood distributor' and 'Local access').



Why do we need to improve Active Travel on rural lanes?

Those living in the most rural areas make 87% of their journeys by car. This leads to higher carbon emissions, while those without cars risk social isolation alongside higher levels of expenditure on transport¹.

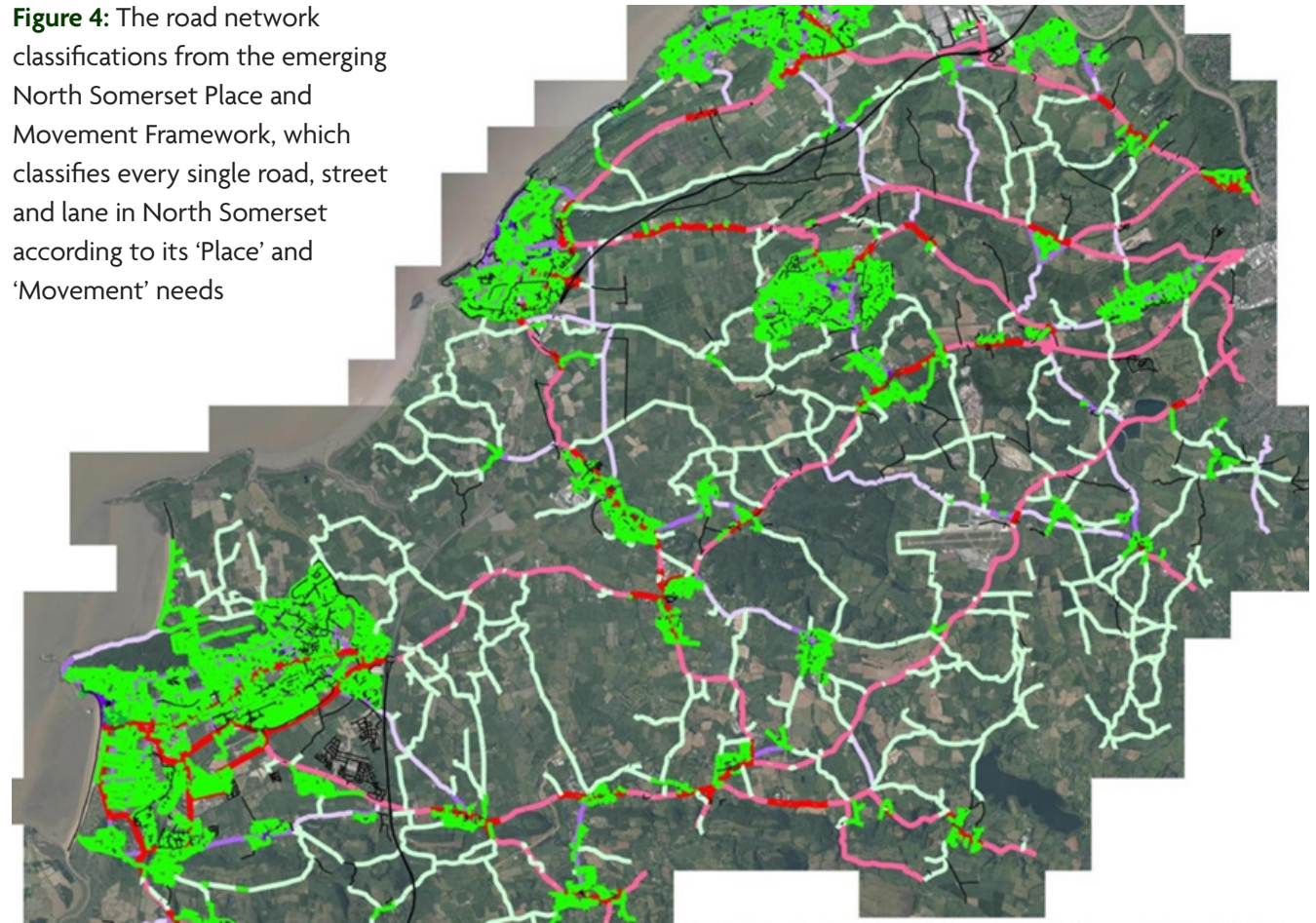
Within the Place and Movement Framework, the Rural Lanes Action Plan will fall mostly within the Rural 'Local Access' classification outlined above, with some Urban Local Access streets where routes pass through villages.

Currently, some of our rural lanes experience inappropriate levels of traffic for their status causing anxiety to local residents and making the lanes less attractive to active travel. Improving the active travel connections between our settlements in rural areas and discouraging drivers from using rural lanes in favour of more appropriate roads can help address this. These active travel improvements will help connect homes, education, work, shops, health services, and public transport (including mobility hubs).

Our residents and visitors also want routes suitable for leisure, exercise and access to the countryside. Active travel is a great investment for the climate, our health and also our local economy. Walking/wheeling, cycling and horse riding are all popular leisure and tourism activities with proven economic benefits.

¹ South West Rural Mobility Strategy

Figure 4: The road network classifications from the emerging North Somerset Place and Movement Framework, which classifies every single road, street and lane in North Somerset according to its 'Place' and 'Movement' needs



North Somerset Rural Lanes will take a two tier approach:

- High Demand Rural Routes
- Quiet Lanes

2a. High demand rural active travel routes

High demand walking, wheeling and cycling rural routes are rural access roads that are serving a strategic purpose with high levels of usage by active travel (and therefore vulnerable road users) and may connect to off-road cycle routes such as the Festival Way. We will identify the most heavily-used, strategic or long distance cycle routes on lanes where there is existing demand and usage by vulnerable road users.

Reducing speed limits to 40mph will be a key tool in improving the safety of vulnerable road users. Where vehicle speeds remain an issue, we will look to introduce additional measures to slow speeds.

At junctions where an off-road route crosses or joins a road we will introduce measures to improve the safety of vulnerable road users. A consistent approach to signage and branding will be used to help ensure all users understand what is expected of them.

Suggested approach for NSC

High demand rural active travel routes will be improved by reduced vehicle speeds and inappropriate routing of through-traffic in both rural and semi-rural communities. This will be done by:

- Locating them where there is existing demand and usage by vulnerable road users.

Rural – local access



West End, Nailsea



Unknown, UK (good example)

- Implementing 40mph speed limits or zones along with traffic management measures and access restrictions, where appropriate, on routes where vulnerable user activity or demand are highest. Particular attention will be given to routes that provide connectivity to Key Strategic Cycle



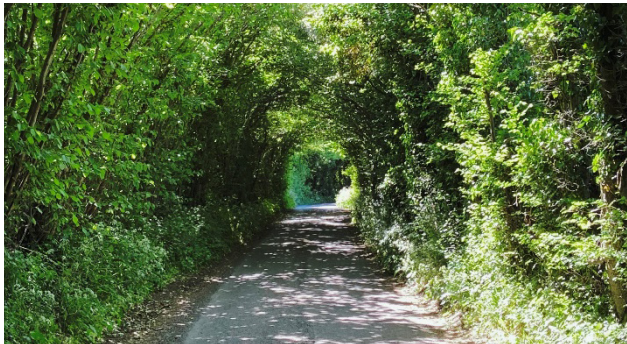
Station Road, Flax Bourton (Festival Way)



Potential improvements for vulnerable users

- Routes or that connect transport hubs in towns and rural communities.
- Identify rural villages that are on the routes and reduce speeds to 20mph.

- Improve access to Key Strategic Off-Road Cycle Routes and ensure that where routes cross rural roads, appropriate prioritisation and safety measures are implemented (including but not limited to reduced speeds, and improved lighting and visibility).
- Implementation of virtual footways where no facilities exist or are substandard.



2b. Quiet Lanes

On rural lanes that are less heavily used by vulnerable users but nonetheless an important asset for rural activities, we will look to preserve this quality through the promotion of the nationally recognised **Quiet Lanes**.

An example of a Quiet Lane sign and some of its users (North Yorkshire Council)



What is a Quiet Lane?

- A nationally recognised designation of single-track road (i.e. no line markings),
- Typically with less than 1,000 vehicles using it per day.
- They are routes where visitors and local residents can enjoy the natural surroundings and use them for activities such as cycling, horse-riding, jogging and walking/wheeling.

- Drivers are encouraged to travel at slower speeds.
- The idea is not to restrict motor vehicles on these rural routes, but to encourage considerate use of the road, so they can be shared and enjoyed by all.
- Community ownership – NSC, interest groups and local communities develop a partnership to establish a local consensus about local travel.

What Quiet Lanes are not:

- Roads closed to motor vehicles, although some may be for access only or make restrictions on the type of vehicle able to use them.
- Roads where non-motorised transport has priority. Nobody has priority.
- Just about speed limits.
- Urban traffic calming measures.
- Attempts to deny access to cars.
- Anti-car.
- Designed to restrict choice. Rather they widen choice, so that people can use and enjoy a variety of means of travel.
- An attempt to disrupt the economic life of the countryside or prevent delivery vans, farm machinery and emergency vehicles from going about their business.²

² <https://www.southglos.gov.uk/transport-and-streets/streets/road-and-traffic-management-information/quiet-lanes/>

Suggested approach for NSC

Quiet Lanes will adopt a share with care approach on rural lanes that whilst not strategically important, are an important part of the rural character and provide attractive low traffic routes through rural areas. We will do this by:

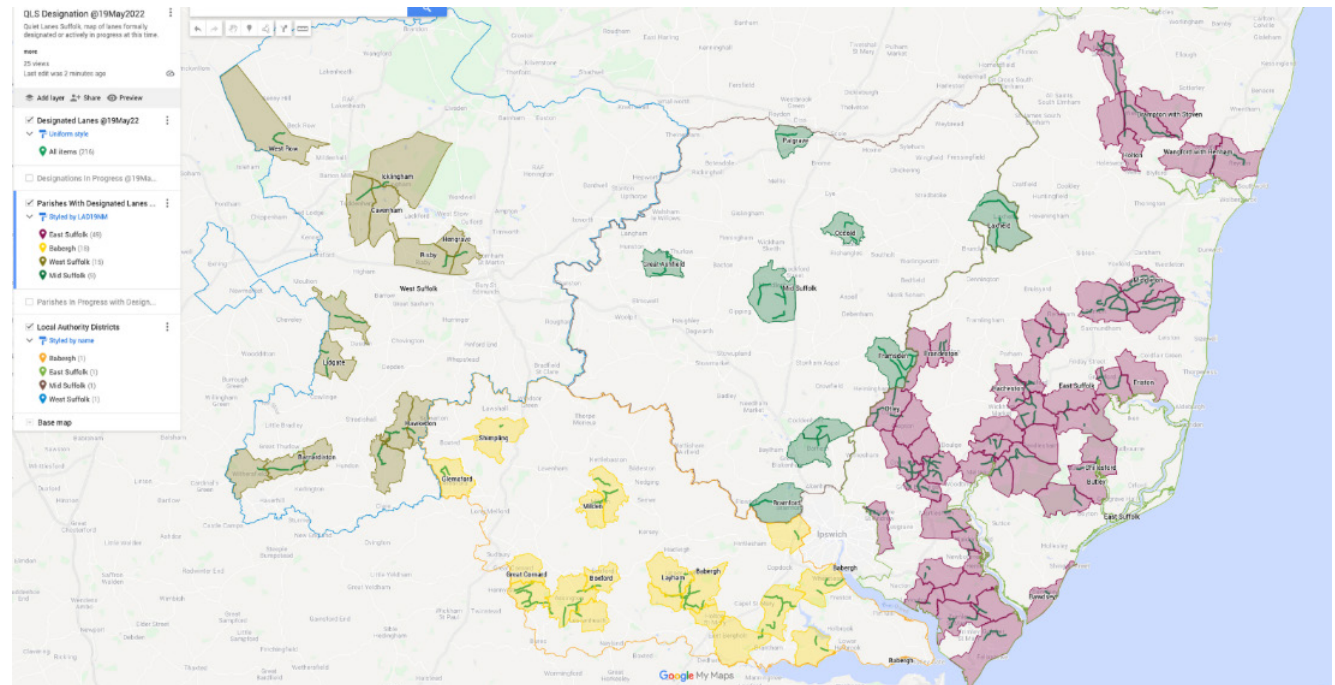
- Identifying all suitable rural lanes that could become quiet lanes.
- Ensure they have less than 1,000 vehicles per day.
- Encourage local buy-in – for example as with 20mph schemes – encourage parish councils to come forward.
- Implementing 40mph speed limits or zones.
- Implement nationally recognised Quiet Lane signage.

How would the project affect the local area?

We will take care to retain and enhance the local character. We will also consult the local community throughout the development process about what resources we should use.

Through-traffic must be kept on appropriate roads. We might put lower speed limits in place to calm traffic through villages. We would have to plan any speed management measures carefully with the local police and support them through public awareness campaigns and local community participation.

Figure 5: Map of Suffolk Quiet Lanes network (Source: Suffolk County Council)



The approaches identified above will help North Somerset to shift everyday transport choices to more active ways, such as walking/wheeling and cycling through improved active travel infrastructure, road safety improvements and help build 30-minute rural communities.

2c. Links to our other plans, schemes and activities

Here we set out how this Rural Lanes Action Plan and our resulting Rural Lanes schemes will relate to and work with the six other Active Travel Action Plans (ATAPs), as well as other NSC plans, strategies, schemes and activities (including those of external stakeholders too).

Guiding principles:

- Improve access to Key Strategic Off-Road Cycle Routes and ensure that where routes cross rural roads appropriate prioritisation and safety measures (including but not limited to reduced speeds, increased lighting and visibility) are implemented.
- Improve access to education, healthcare and local services for rural communities. Reduced vehicle speeds and inappropriate routing of through traffic in both rural and semi-rural communities, together with implementation of virtual footways in higher footfall areas, where no facilities exist or are substandard.
- Implementing 40mph speed limits or zones along with traffic calming measures and access restrictions, where appropriate, on routes where vulnerable user activity or demand are highest. Particular attention will be given to routes that provide connectivity to Key Strategic Cycle Routes or that connect transport hubs in towns and rural communities.

Active Travel Action Plans

Other plan/activity	How this Action Plan will interlink/work alongside
20mph Action Plan	New 20mphs in rural villages on key routes.
Active Travel Network Action Plan	Routes will link to entry points to towns and form part of the Active Travel Network.
First and Last Mile Action Plan	Improved access to rural mobility hubs and other services to aim towards '30-minute rural communities' concept.
Liveable Neighbourhoods Action Plan	Some new Liveable Neighbourhoods may be adjacent to rural lanes and provide improved links to countryside leisure and other transport connections.

Other plan/activity	How this Action Plan will interlink/work alongside
Safer Active Routes to School Action Plan/ school engagement generally	Link to school streets in rural areas and tie in with identified safer active routes to school schemes.
Transport Behaviour Change Action Plan	Provide opportunities to promote active travel on both existing and newly improved routes.

Other plans

Other plan/activity	How this Action Plan will interlink/work alongside
Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)	We will consider whether Rural Lanes scheme proposals can support BSIP proposals to create a better experience for bus users and increase bus patronage.
NSC Integrated Transport Programme	Use collision data to identify hotspot areas we can plan improvements for with Rural Lanes and traffic calming.
NSC Joint Physical Activity Strategy (JPAS)	The emerging NSC JPAS will identify a range of barriers to people taking up active travel as a daily or regular transport choice or activity. One of these will be traffic speeds/volumes on rural lanes, so we will work with the Public Health team to help ensure the JPAS and this Action Plan are consistent with and support each other on removing or easing these barriers to active travel take-up.
NSC Local Plan	Development sites in, or adjacent to, our rural transport network, will, through the planning process need to either contribute to, or deliver nearby identified Rural Lanes schemes as mitigations for their impacts on the nearby transport network.

Other plan/activity	How this Action Plan will interlink/work alongside
NSC Maintenance Programme	We will work with maintenance colleagues to plan and deliver maintenance schemes in synchronisation with our rural lanes schemes to save time, funding and disruption to the transport network. This will add value to both maintenance and rural lanes schemes, with both benefitting from the other wherever appropriate (for example a rural lane scheme area benefitting from highway resurfacing or new cycle markings as part of maintenance works).
North Somerset Transport Narrative	All our communications with our communities and stakeholders on Rural Lanes scheme proposals will be framed under the emerging Transport Narrative about how NSC are responding to the cost of living crisis, climate emergency and lack of transport options – through making shorter and medium journeys more attractive to the cheapest form of transport: active travel.
Place and Movement Framework	All Rural Lanes schemes will be consistent with our Place and Movement Framework (PMF) and will be developed using the PMF's emerging design guidance.

3. Scheme proposals and delivery plan

Scheme development process

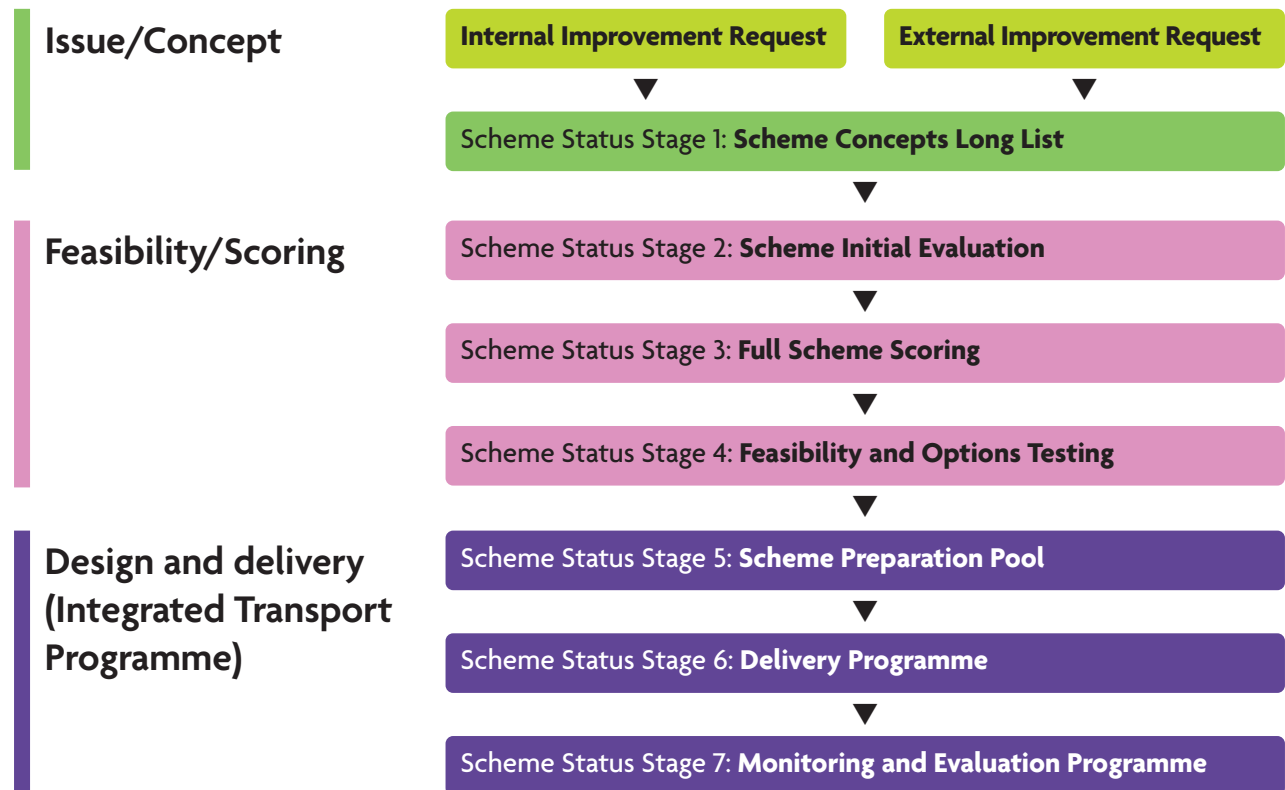
To help fulfil the Open and Fair values of our NSC Corporate Plan, a transparent and consistent process has been developed to give North Somerset and the council a future ‘pipeline’ of Integrated Transport schemes. A more formal process and centralised database is needed to record, score, prioritise and develop transport network issues or scheme proposals into deliverable transport improvement schemes for and with our communities. This future ‘scheme pipeline’ is also being requested at regular intervals by central government’s Department for Transport via new government agency Active Travel England.

This seven-stage internal process, the scheme development process, aims to fulfil this by enabling us to sift urgent issues to the right officers and teams at the right stages. For scheme proposals the process tests both the case for investment and their feasibility and deliverability via a transparent, consistent process, before they are allocated funding to progress them to delivery. The process is outlined in Figure 6.

Figure 6: The Scheme development process, which North Somerset Council officers will use to record, score and prioritise all transport network issues/improvement requests.

Integrated Transport – Scheme development process

Assuming the scheme proposal passes each stage



Draft scheme delivery plan

The table below shows examples of Rural Lanes scheme proposals that could be developed subject to funding and community support. This list is by no means complete – we want to hear your ideas, issues, and requests for improvements in your area for this Active Travel Networks Action Plan:

Town and parish councils and NSC Elected Members – please use the **Highway Improvement Request Form** on the NSC website to submit your transport network improvement requests. Issues and scheme requests will be recorded, scored and prioritised against all the other scheme proposals.

Residents, businesses, visitors and other stakeholders – we would encourage you to contact **your town or parish council** and/or **your Elected North Somerset Councillor** for your ward area to discuss issues in your area. However, we also encourage you to add your requests to the location you feel needs improvements at **Widen My Path**. During and following the consultation on these Action Plans, we will record, score and prioritise all issues/scheme requests that are received. We will review the Active Travel Action Plans annually and update them as appropriate.

It is important to note that the delivery of all integrated transport schemes (including all Rural Lanes proposals) are subject to the council securing necessary funding and internal/external staff resource to progress the scheme proposals.

Scheme location	Brief scheme content	Scheme status*
Backwell Bow/ Backwell Common	Enhancing the link between Backwell and Festival Way	Early engagement
West End Nailsea	Reducing attractiveness to through traffic on selective lanes to protect our rural areas from rat-running traffic, enhancing our rural communities and improving active travel safety and access to the countryside	Concept
Tutshill Pier to Pier route	Enhancement to new showcase route ensuring reduced traffic and speeds wherever possible	Concept
Sandmead Road/Churchill Green, Churchill	Enabling link to new Banwell Bypass infrastructure and Strawberry Line from Churchill, reducing impact of school traffic	Concept
Kenn Street, Kenn	Reducing the attractiveness of Kenn St as a through route – parish council have identified through traffic as key issue	Concept
Quiet Lanes to be developed with parish councils and community groups	To be confirmed	Concept

*Concept; Feasibility; Early engagement; Design, Consultation; Delivery

This publication is available in large print, Braille or audio formats on request.

Help is also available for people who require council information in languages other than English.

For all enquiries please contact the Transport Team
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