

# Evidence for West Devon Local Cycling and Walking Implementation Plan



## Introduction

[Transition Tavistock](#) is a volunteer-run community environmental group covering Tavistock and the southern part of West Devon, founded in 2008 as part of the [Transition movement](#). It's [Travel Action Group](#), active since 2019, advocates more sustainable local travel. We welcome the Council's preparation of an LCWIP, and are promoting the associated survey through our newsletters and social media. This briefing paper complements that by summarising insights we have gained over the past 4 years into ways that walking, wheeling and cycling could be made easier in this area. These are drawn from discussion at our group meetings, conversations with the public at event stalls, our responses to policy consultations, and our volunteers' experience checking the paths shown on our recently published [Walkable Tavistock map](#). Locations cited are in Tavistock unless otherwise stated.

## General

The nationally known factors affecting propensity to use active travel apply here, but perhaps with some differences of emphasis arising from local geography and culture:

**Wetter weather:** which is very frequent west of Dartmoor, deters cycling due to safety / clothing change concerns; also increases negative impact of potholes. The weather has a lesser impact on walking as it can be more readily prepared for, but rapid growth of hedges or intruding undergrowth (e.g. brambles) is a significant issue, sometimes forcing people off pavements.

**Gradient:** limits choice of routes for some people, but welcomed by others for views / fitness benefits. It means that seats (including at bus stops) and rails are needed to make a walking trip achievable for some people with health problems. For novice / out of practice cyclists, starting and ending a journey from home on a hill is challenging. There is increasing (but still limited) ownership of e-bikes among relatively older / prosperous people.

**Journey purpose:** leisure walking (inc exercising dogs) in countryside is popular, but often starts with a short car journey. Paradoxically, this may mean walking for functional trips is valued less. Leisure cyclists (both sports-clad and touring) are often seen. Cycle trips for commuting or to facilities are less visible, but are made by a number of our contacts.

**Safety:** We hear of significant road safety concerns re cycling – including from new residents who had cycled regularly in previous location. Legal but inappropriate speed on main roads passing through villages worries both walkers and cyclists. On our many very narrow rural lanes (often 'sunken' between high banks, and without any verges), these concerns are magnified. However, fear of crime and antisocial behaviour is relatively low, and streets have friendly feel.

## Aspects where infrastructure could be improved – within settlements

### Pavements

On numerous sections of residential streets, and of roads connecting them to nearest open space, there is pavement on one side only (often swapping – examples [Old Launceston Road](#), [Deer Park Lane](#)) or none at all. The Walkable Tavistock map highlights a few of those with no pavement (pink shading) to warn those unfamiliar with what are otherwise logical

and useful routes. Particular problems are [Anderton Lane](#), used by residents of Whitchurch to get to the Plymouth bus route, and [Green Lane](#) which is the direct connection from a major ex-council estate to the open space of Whitchurch Down. In rural West Devon there are places such as the [Devon Oaks](#) park homes site which are within a walkable distance of local facilities but have no available path to them.

### ***Pedestrian and cyclist safety at junctions***

Pavements sometimes shrink to nothing at a junction, leaving the pedestrian to step into the road to see whether it is safe to cross. (Examples: corner of [Chapel St](#) - the pavement by Abbey Surgery; [Whitham Park / Whitchurch Rd](#) junction; [golf club corner](#) on Down Road).

Some junctions which people have to use for everyday trips are known to be problematic for all road users due to sight lines, traffic speed and lack of any form of pedestrian crossing. Examples are the [Church Hill / Whitchurch Road crossroads](#) by Whitchurch Post Office and the [Pixon Lane / Whitchurch Road](#) junction. The “prove there are casualties” approach to justifying intervention ignores the deterrent effect this has on active travel.

### ***Wheelchair and pushchair accessibility***

We are aware that there have been long running concerns, and difficulty finding solutions, regarding dropped kerbs, steps into shops, and the cobble-like informal crossing points in Tavistock town centre. We have not looked at this in enough detail to offer specific suggestions.

In the wider residential area we observe that dropped kerbs are present to suit cars – ie as the exit from a driveway – and not for wheelchair or pushchair users. This means the slope may be unsuitable, or getting onto the pavement the other side of the road require a long diagonal transit, passing parked cars. For this reason, some residents with powered wheelchairs regularly stay on the road.

While there is step free access to NCN270 / viaduct path through Tavistock at Crease Lane and Kilworthy Park, the intermediate points of access involve steps. In particular, there seems no logical reason for the access [at Bolt House Close](#) – up steps to an unsurfaced path fenced off from the adjacent quiet road – not to be opened up, much improving access from north-west Tavistock to a route which is a useful short cut as well as a leisure option and safe place for children to practice cycling.

Some new estates lack “wheelable” connections to their neighbourhood. WDBC officers will be aware of how this was permitted by the planning system. Examples are the [Crebor Rd](#) estate (stepped path only) and [Trendle Gardens](#) (connected to town by a pavement on the A386 which at one point is very narrow.) “[The Tors](#)”, a major estate still under construction off Callington Rd, requires residents to cross the A390 to walk into Tavistock. The provision for wheeling appears to be small dropped kerb sections on each side with no island in between, or warning signs for approaching traffic, forcing users to cross both carriageways in one move, with no protection. (There is a triangular island with kerbs nearer the roundabout – though even that would be challenging for, eg, a group of parents with small children to cross at school time.) It has been suggested to us that this is in breach of the planning conditions: WDBC officers will have the relevant information on the junction design approved.

### ***Cycle paths***

There is a site identified for a [railway station](#) reachable through the Tors, should the bid for restoration of the Bere Alston / Tavistock rail link (which we support) be approved. Attractive

cycling and pedestrian links to the station direct from southern Tavistock would be important to gain the maximum benefit from this. We are not aware of scoping of these having been done yet, but the LCWIP could identify the need, and potentially offer outline ideas. (The Tors plans include a cycle route towards Tavistock College. WDBC officers should know what the latest version of the plans says about this, and when / whether it is likely to be constructed.)

Cyclists are often seen entering or leaving Tavistock along the A386 (or its pavement!) north of Morrisons. When asked why, while some have missed signs (see below), others are aware of the NCN route round Tavistock College but see it as too indirect. We do not have a suggested solution to this reasonable desire to head straight into town. We recognise that the on-street parking which prevents a cycle lane is needed by residents of the “Bedford Cottages” on the west of the road, but would welcome ideas from the LCWIP team. With further housing soon to be built beside [the A386 south of Lidl](#), it is important that there are safe cycling connections direct from this to NCN 27 in both directions which do not involve cycling on the A386 or extra pressure on the already hazardous shared pavement beside Lidl.<sup>1</sup> One option for the route north would be a short traffic free link between the new estate and the Morrisons car park, which would also make it easier for the new residents to reach the supermarkets and the round-town bus service on foot.

NCN27 along St Johns Avenue into the centre of Tavistock is a generally wide and attractive route, though with one narrow opening which excludes some non-standard cycles. However, on arrival at Whitchurch Road, access to all town centre facilities (and the onward route) is across [Abbey Bridge](#) at a roundabout on the A386 which large HGVs regularly use. The pavement is often busy, so even dismounting and wheeling may mean staying on the road. There are even greater problems going in the other direction. This, as well as confusion about signage (see below) may be one reason why some cyclists use the opposite bank of the Tavy, where cycling is (rightly, to avoid conflict with pedestrians so close to the river) not permitted. Ideas for making crossing the river in the town centre safer for both cyclists and pedestrians welcome.

### ***Cycle parking***

Apart from signposting (see below) the main gap seems to be secure covered storage with flexible availability, at locations such as shopping centres, workplaces and key points on bus routes. Desire for this is increasing with levels of cycle theft, and the cost of e-bikes. There is also limited provision for non-standard cycles (with Tesco in Tavistock an exception) and for “park and picnic” seating in town centres, so cyclists can top up with a takeaway pasty and sit close to their bike while enjoying it.

### **Aspects where infrastructure could be improved – between settlements**

**Tavistock – Gunnislake:** A short, if steep & bendy, car trip, but no safe route for cycling, and no well defined walking route to connect with the routes up and down the Tamar.

**Yelverton – Roborough / Derriford:** Important for West Devon residents commuting to a major health & technology part of Plymouth, and potentially for residents of new development at Woolwell<sup>2</sup> commuting to Tavistock. See our [comment](#) on the May 2022

---

<sup>1</sup> Our detailed comments made in 2020 re this site are [here](#): while there have been significant changes (WDBC officers aware) to the planning situation since then, we suspect the outcome has made the active travel prospects even worse.

<sup>2</sup> Woolwell is in South Hams, due to a quirk of the border. We commented on active travel aspects of the 2020 plans [here](#).

Devon CC consultation on this. There has been little public communication about the outcome of that – but it is often raised when we seek views on cycling.

## **Potential for improved information and influencing**

### ***Obstructed pavements***

Members of our group with disabilities have continued concerns about this, eg: A-boards inconsiderately placed and/or wider than the officially allowed limit, cafes placing tables and chairs on the pavement without leaving the movement space that should be required by their licence. (On looking into particular examples raised with us, we have found it impossible to check whether there is indeed a licence held – unlike other districts, WDBC did not publish a list.)

We have tried to understand the rules and explain them to people affected. The relative roles of county / district / parish in ensuring town / village centres are accessible are not obvious to the public, and there is a perception that none of them are prepared to intervene. We would like to see a proactive and preventative approach by WDBC: ensuring business owners understand both the rules and the impact on vulnerable people of ignoring them, and have practical help to get it right. For more detail see our [response](#) to the WDBC Tavistock Conservation Area Review which itself identified this as a problem. Our observation is that once a few premises put out A boards that are oversized or away from their own boundary, others in the street decide they need to do the same or be overlooked.

### ***Signage***

In working on our map we discovered some ambiguity on which of the traffic free paths allow cycling. For example, the wide path along [Crowndale Rd](#) alongside Tavistock College is suitable for, and used by, cycles, but there is no sign at the point where it meets the NCN. Some paths (eg those linking Westbridge Industrial Estate to Battery Lane) have “No cycling” signs at each end – which is appropriate, but a missed opportunity to encourage use as a footpath. (“Cyclists dismount” is preferable anyhow.)

In the initial stages of the project which produced our map we considered signage of the more significant cut-throughs, eg through roundels, more important. However, on investigating the tasks involved we decided it was beyond the capacity of a volunteer group to do, but would need a statutory body to lead, with community support on the detail. The positive reception for our map has confirmed that people were not aware of all the existing paths, so we still think signage would be worthwhile.

The NCN signs in Tavistock need some rethinking. Cyclists miss them in the [Morrisons](#) area when heading into Plymouth, and also coming through the town centre in both directions. For example, tourists stop for lunch then start cycling out of town along [Parkwood Road](#), realise they should be on a railway path and ask how to get up to it – which at that point involves complex rerouting, even if the person asks knows the route. While there are correct signs near Abbey Bridge, the traffic danger while using the route there (see above) gives little time to look at them. The information sign boards / maps along NCN27 have been put in by varying organisations at different times, and none has clear information about where to find cycle parking. We have included sites on our Tavistock map, and suggest that all levels of councils should now see this as a standard element of any map or directions they provide.

### ***Continued engagement and better awareness of active travel in the Council***

The examples we have provided of our responses to past planning applications probably reveal some frustration that we as volunteers have to spend time pointing out what seem obvious practical flaws in a design (eg steps on a supposed cycle path, no pedestrian short cut to neighbouring site, access to a national cycle route claimed as a feature with no provision to actually reach it), which none of the public bodies involved seem to have identified. Unfortunately comments by highways and police seem car focused and rarely suggest changes to encourage active travel.

Training of planning officers and elected members in how to get maximum active travel benefits in new developments would be a welcome outcome of the LCWIP process. For example: how to be confident about what good practice looks like and encourage it in pre-application discussions; how to critically appraise a transport assessment and check for claims which do not fit the reality on the ground; how to “walk through” a plan with the perspective of a parent with double buggy, a student cycling to school, an elder recovering from hip surgery.

We have seen references in WDBC minutes to the Council intending, within this project, to set up district wide forum for engaging community groups with active travel interests. We would welcome this, especially if linked to a Devon wide network which could engage the County Council and relevant police departments as well.

### **Conclusion**

We commend West Devon BC on initiating this project and look forward to the next public consultation stage. For any queries on this briefing, or requests to publicize LCWIP related events or information through our newsletters, contact us via [travel@transitiontavistock.org.uk](mailto:travel@transitiontavistock.org.uk).

28<sup>th</sup> July 2023