

Britainthinks

Insight & Strategy

B&NES Council | Citizens' Panel on Active Travel in Bath and North East Somerset

Summary report to present to Cabinet

Background and objectives

Bath and North East Somerset Council declared a climate emergency in 2019.

As part of their vision for active travel, and to promote healthier, safer and more convenient ways to travel locally, Bath and North East Somerset Council is looking to improve sustainable transport links and reduce travel demand between employment and education sites in the Claverton Down area.

The Council is committed to ensuring local citizens have their say in the principles that should guide the Council when bringing in active travel schemes in the local area.



Bath & North East Somerset Council commissioned BritainThinks to run a Citizens' Panel, the Council's first venture into deliberative consultation.

Deliberative research gives participants information, time and space to come to considered views on the topic of transport, where existing knowledge is low and trade-offs are complex. This form of research takes participants on a journey in way that is highly effective for participant-learning and facilitating a 'citizen mindset'.

Methodology

We conducted a Call for Evidence prior to beginning the fieldwork to ensure that a wider audience – including residents, local groups and businesses – were able to share their views and put forward arguments on active travel, and on specific active travel schemes. This consisted of 4 questions and ran between Wednesday 13th April – Monday 2nd May, collecting 737 responses.



1. Launch event and initial sessions

30-minute plenary launch event with all panellists followed by 4x 90-minute focus groups

This stage is to understand spontaneous views and the context in which residents are living right now

3x 60-minute in-depth interviews with 'hard-to-reach' residents, who find it difficult to take part in research online or need accommodations to take part

Conducted between 17th - 23rd of May



2. Online community platform

Online community consisting of 5x activities on a specialist online platform

This stage is to understand informed views and how priorities might change as they learn more about the options and solutions for active transport links

'Hard-to-reach' residents offered physical information packs reflecting content of the digital learning platform

Conducted between 25th May - 5th June



3. Deliberation sessions

5x 105-minute reconvened focus groups

This stage is to understand considered views and to weight up different approaches and explore trade offs and priorities

3x 60-minute reconvened in-depth interviews with panellists unable to attend a group

Conducted between 8th - 14th of June

Sample

27
panellists

Including 3x ‘hard-to-reach’

All local residents of Bath and North East Somerset, who interact with routes between the Claverton Down plateau and Bath city centre with varying levels of regularity.

A mix of typical modes of travel.



10 x urban



10 x suburban



7 x rural



13 x female



14 x male

ABC1	18
C2DE	9
Disabled / LTHC	7
Ethnic minority background	4
18-34	6
35-54	11
55+	10

1. Concerns about travelling locally come to mind easily and are usually related to congestion on the roads and poor public transport options. While active travel infrastructure is felt to be lacking when prompted, this rarely comes up as a spontaneous concern.

“Some of the roads through/in the area are horrible to cycle or drive on because of the state of them and because of bottle-necks which cause congestion and add to the pollution in the area”.

Infrequent active traveller, 35-54

“The area I live in is very congested so I'm not very positive. I take my children to school every morning, it's very car heavy, at times dangerous, and air pollution is a real concern for me with children. ”

Frequent active traveller, 35-54

2. Residents are broadly positive about active travel and its health and environmental benefits in terms of air pollution. People would personally like to walk and cycle more, but find it difficult if they don't feel fit, mobile or safe enough, especially up/down steep local hills.

"[Walking is] convenient, it's healthy, it doesn't require any specialist knowledge or transport needs and you can do things in your own time, it can be quite relaxing."

Frequent active traveller, 55+

"If you could encourage more people to walk, I understand it's not possible for everyone, but it would be good for the environment and reduce carbon emissions."

Frequent active traveller, 18-34

"You're not going to be cycling in heavy traffic because you'd be inhaling all those fumes."

Infrequent active traveller, 55+

3. While residents are also broadly positive about bringing in specific active travel interventions in Bath and North East Somerset, there is a sticking point on the impact on motorists of making space on the road for active travel schemes.

“If your bike is safe, then more people would invest in bikes.”

Infrequent active traveller, 35-54

“The issues will be that, less parking spaces will be difficult for residents and for visitors to Bath. It also alienates residents and makes them less receptive to change. ”

Infrequent active traveller, 55+

4. When potential active travel schemes in the Claverton Down area are discussed, residents raise concerns about the Council being able to encourage someone like them to use active travel up and down such a steep hill. They say the uphill gradient feels too steep for people of 'normal' fitness and going downhill on narrow roads feels unsafe.

"Cycle routes should focus on flatter areas. More people would use it then"

Infrequent active traveller, 55+

"I'm fit enough but I would be knackered by the time I had cycled into work and then I'd have to do an 8 hour day"

Frequent active traveller, 18-34

5. However, there is evidence to suggest that residents do support an active travel route on one road up the hill to make travelling actively feel safer as well as providing e-bikes to make travelling up steep hills feel easier and more achievable for ‘normal’ people.

*“An e-bike hire scheme would be ideal
wouldn’t it. That would be a game changer.
The cost is a bit prohibitive.”*

Frequent active traveller, 45-55

Following reflections on active travel benefits and drawbacks, active travel infrastructure and some specific active travel schemes, the Citizens Panel devised their own principles to guide active travel implementation in BANES.

Residents' principles for decision-making on active travel schemes

Any new active travel schemes in and around Bath and North East Somerset should....

1.

Offer an easy and appealing alternative to short car journeys.

2.

Have clear and effective safety features (to reassure new cyclists especially).

3.

Be connected and integrated into the wider transport network.

4.

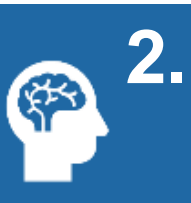
Be careful not to disadvantage those who can't easily choose active travel.

Final conclusions and recommendations (1/2)



1.

There are opportunities to progress your active travel strategy with public support as there are clear push factors away from car use that can be leveraged i.e. residents have many complaints related to private car use and are aware they contribute to carbon emissions and climate change.



2.

More could be done to foreground active travel as the solution to the travel problems they are experiencing, because when thinking about tackling the transport problems active travel isn't the top-of-mind response - residents tend to think about ways that driving or public transport could be improved.



3.

Talking about active travel as a means to reducing carbon emissions will not be enough to encourage people to make the switch. It will be much more powerful to talk about the personal benefits to lifestyle, health and the local environment (especially in terms of reducing air pollution).



4.

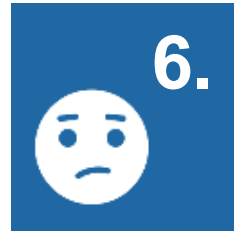
A step-change in the public transport provision will also need to accompany a move away from cars and towards active travel to enable easy modal switches en route e.g. buses that can hold bikes.

Final conclusions and recommendations (2/2)



5.

Widespread uptake of active travel is about a mindset shift and you will need to bring residents along with you as part of the solution. There is support for the idea of creating an infrastructure to enable active travel choices, but debates about road space are not resolved and you will need to help people connect to the idea that they are being asked to swap out some of their own car journeys.



6.

You will need to proactively support and reassure those who are anxious, scared, less able or unable to travel actively. Personal ambivalence or a feeling of being excluded leads to anger and rejection of the idea, even when there are personal benefits to be had.



7.

Many are open to travelling more actively but nervous about cycling – accessible active travel infrastructure will be important to help encourage these residents to start cycling. The infrastructure changes that will make the biggest difference are continuous, segregated lanes on well-surfaced roads in flatter areas plus affordable e-bikes (e.g. via a rental scheme or subsidies) so that going up steeper areas feels more achievable for the average resident.



Thank you

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