

Good evening. My name is Nicola Wilson, and I am a Parish Councillor for Chew Stoke.

I have lived in the Chew Valley for most of my life, on a farm overlooking Chew Valley Lake. Over 25 years ago, when I was at primary school with my three sisters, my grandmother, Margaret Wilson, first raised the idea of creating a path around the lake. The vision was simple but powerful: to use disused roads to create a safe route, separated from traffic, where families could walk and cycle freely, and our villages could be properly connected.

This idea led to the formation of the Chew Valley Recreational Trail Association, which made real progress. And while some sections now exist, the loop has never been completed. My grandmother's hope was that we, as children, could cycle safely to visit our other grandparents in Hinton Blewett. Today, the same applies to my nephews wanting to visit their aunt—and this is the shared experience of so many families in our community. I share this not to talk about myself, but to show you the lived reality of residents, and the frustration of waiting decades for such a basic need to be met.

It is remarkable that in today's society we still do not have something as essential as a safe, connected path. Such a route would give young people safe independence to visit friends or travel to school, allow residents to cycle to work, and give older people the chance to enjoy the outdoors without fear of traffic. It would transform daily life—helping people connect, move safely between villages, and enjoy everything the valley has to offer.

Traffic has risen sharply in recent years. Airport expansion, higher speeds, and antisocial driving have made our roads increasingly dangerous. The absence of a path between the Harptrees and Bishop Sutton is particularly hazardous. My own family knows this pain all too well: my grandfather was killed on this very stretch of road 20 years ago. More recently, another fatal crash around the lake has underlined the urgent need for a safe, sustainable alternative for people of all ages.

Beyond safety, the benefits are wide-reaching. A completed path would support the local economy, attract visitors, promote active travel, and provide opportunities for people to connect with and learn about the natural environment.

It is my sincere hope that you, as BANES councillors, will recognise this long-standing community need and make it a priority within your active travel and sustainability plans. By working with Bristol Water, you have the chance to help deliver a vision that began over 25 years ago—so that not only my children and my sisters' children, but the whole community, can finally enjoy a safe, sustainable, and connected way to access the Chew Valley.

Cheers