



Active Travel groups come together to set a vision for a network of Greenways across Somerset

A coalition of Somerset based and national organisations have come together to launch the **Somerset Greenways Vision**. This is a map of existing and proposed routes to link local communities using a combination of traffic free paths and quiet lanes across the county, very much in line with the Department for Transport's [Gear Change](#) Report published in July 2020.

We challenge the notion that these routes will be used purely for leisure. With the advent of electric bikes and electric cargo bikes, the distances which our communities are able and willing to travel by sustainable means has increased significantly, especially given the overarching concerns of climate change and of improving public health, which we are all facing together. There is no doubt that when good quality infrastructure is provided, these routes will be used for “utility journeys” - commuting, shopping, accessing vital amenities as well as for exercise and leisure. The benefits which these routes will bring to economic development, carbon reduction and habitat creation as well as to improving our collective physical and mental well being are clear. For this reason, we urge our local authorities to give more consideration to the funding of these routes when making bids for Active Travel grants.

To support this vision we, The Somerset Rail to Trail Project, Frome's Missing Links, The Strawberry Line, The Steam Coast Trail, The Trails Trust, Greenways & Cycleroutes, Isle of Wedmore Access Group, Somerset Ramblers, Disabled Ramblers, Mendip Bridleways Association, South Somerset Bridleways Association, The British Horse Society, Cycling UK and Sustrans have come together to form the **Somerset Active Travel Forum**.

Through the forum we will collaborate both with each other and with Somerset's Local Authorities to bring about a strategic network of active travel routes - 'Greenways' which will link communities across Somerset, enabling us to safely switch to green travel for our everyday journeys.

The forum not only includes the instigators of greenways both across Somerset and nationally, but also gives equal representation to all the vulnerable modes of transport most commonly used in rural areas. This is crucial since the high speeds and volumes of traffic found on some of Somerset's roads challenge all of these users equally, preventing them from using this public infrastructure safely.

We acknowledge that different users of paths have different priorities. Our agreed upon solution is to work side by side to ensure that we design out the potential for conflict at an early stage in the process. All acknowledge that by working together we can deliver safe and attractive public infrastructure for everyone.

Between us we hold unprecedented levels of research, knowledge and experience - after all, some of the routes we are looking at have been waiting in the wings for 30 plus years! We recognize that in the past decade, local authorities have faced funding shortages which have resulted in a gap between the desire to bring forward and the reality of bringing forward active travel routes. We are keen to engage and support Local Authorities in marshalling resources on the ground. Collaborating with local parish active travel groups is essential to ensure that whatever we do is practical and satisfies the needs of the local community. As we slowly emerge from the pandemic, our Local Authorities need our support just as much as we need theirs.

We are aware that the strategic network presented in our Somerset Greenways Vision map has gaps, and we encourage both local authorities, parishes and community groups to come forward with their plans to fill these omissions and thereby create an aspirational map showing where we could be in the not too distant future if we collaborate well. Highways England schemes present a golden opportunity which should not be missed.

The organisations currently on board certainly have their work cut out for them and we would all welcome more community walking, cycling and equestrian groups to form and join with our desire to simply make it easier for people to walk or ride by foot, wheel or hoof from their front door. No doubt there are many active travel groups already formed across Somerset who are prepared to take action and engage fully and we look forward to working with them too.

To Somerset County Council, we request that we form part of a formal process of working together with all Somerset authorities on Active Travel now and into the future.

We hope that this collaboration of minds, experience and effort plus a seat at the table within authorities will deliver progress and the benefits such routes bring elsewhere in the South West.

