

Living Streets Northampton: response to 2022-23 budget consultation

Introduction

This proposed budget does nothing to address the major issues in Northampton caused by the overuse of motor vehicles. This is in spite of the recent [Gear Change](#) and [Gear Change: One Year On](#) policy documents from the Department of Transport (DfT).

The problems we have to address are agreed by the Prime Minister, the DfT, and urban planners worldwide:

- Road transport is the [single biggest contributor](#) to CO2 emissions causing climate change
- Road transport is the single biggest contributor to [air pollution](#) causing strokes, heart attacks, asthma, dementia and smaller lungs in children.
- Problems of obesity and ill-health caused by a sedentary lifestyle are increasing, with 1 in 6 UK deaths caused by inactivity ([Gear Change](#), p8)
- We have serious congestion caused by too many cars. In 10 years, traffic has increased 25%, and by 33% on side roads ([Gear Change: One Year On](#), p6)
- 40% of urban car journeys are less than 2 miles, a distance that most people could easily do on foot or by bike if our road space was properly allocated ([Gear Change](#), p11)

Active Travel in Northampton

It is widely known and understood by urban planners that people will change from driving to cycling or walking only if the right infrastructure is provided.

- In Odense, Denmark, [81% of children cycle to school](#) - in Northampton it's [less than 2%](#), with half of all primary children being driven to school ([Gear Change](#), p18)
- In Northampton, our infrastructure gives so much priority for cars that most people who drive would never even consider any alternative.
- People riding bikes or scooters feel unsafe on the roads, because there is no segregated space for them, resulting in many riding on pavements. This makes walking feel unsafe too, reinforcing the desire to drive instead.

Nothing in the budget plan indicates that the council has any plan to address these issues.

Covid, government Active Travel funding, and public consultations

While nearby cities like Leicester, Nottingham, Coventry, Birmingham and London have taken significant steps to use government funding to change the status quo on their roads (a DfT

requirement), government funding provided to this council has been squandered on items like cycle counters, with no changes to our roads. Not a single Low Traffic Neighbourhood has been created, there are no School Streets, and no segregated cycle lanes.

- A significant portion of the Active Travel Tranche 1 grant was spent on cycle counters. We already know that we have low levels of cycling in the town, so it's hard to see the value of cycle counters if space is not reallocated on our roads.
- The government Active Travel Tranche 2 grant of £1.3m, provided specifically for cycle lanes along Billing Road > Park Avenue > Park Ave Crescent > Wellingborough Road remains unspent (apart from another £50,000 on cycle counters). The council abandoned the initial consultation well before its deadline after 2,000 people petitioned about a 1-way section, and after more than a year no modified plans have been produced.
- The council's [Commonplace consultation](#) undertaken in summer 2020 received over 2,000 responses, identifying items that need rectifying to make people more likely to walk or cycle. Not a single one of these responses has been acted on.
- In April 2018 the council received government funding to develop a Local Cycling & Walking Plan (LCWIP) for Northampton. It took 2.5 years to draw up a plan. Now, the LCWIP has been withdrawn for "further development" (using another government grant), with no details on timescales, consultations, or management structure.

Additional Notes

- If we continue to neglect Active Travel, the council is likely to see an overall reduction in DfT funding: "an authority's performance on active travel will help determine the wider funding allocations it receives, not just on active travel." ([Gear Change: One Year On](#), p21)
- Northampton has no Action Plan for its seven Air Quality Management Areas despite being legally required to do so
- Important decisions about Active Travel are repeatedly put off, with councillors apparently afraid of any controversy. Yet as the Prime Minister points out in [Gear Change](#) (page 5): "...when the results of consultations and opinion polls came back, our opponents [of Active Travel Schemes] were often surprised to find themselves in a small minority. People *want* the radical change we are committing to in this strategy."
- The council cabinet now states that it [intends to use Active Travel funding](#) (see item 37) to improve the crossing at the top of Rushmere Rd. This must be referring to Tranche 2 funding, yet this is not what the funding was provided for. The current poorly designed crossing should be put right using existing highways funding.