

# Cycle routes: their impact on neighbours

**Sustrans**  
ROUTES FOR PEOPLE

INFORMATION SHEET FF23

## INTRODUCTION

The National Cycle Network, being developed by Local Authorities in partnership with Sustrans, links traffic-free paths with on-road cycle routes and aims to provide 8,000 miles of continuous safe and attractive cycle route by 2005.

Over half the National Cycle Network will be on urban or rural minor roads. The remainder will make use of derelict railways, waterside paths, forest roads, cycle paths and other routes. In order to be as useful as possible to local people, these routes are designed to pass through urban and residential areas wherever possible.

The purpose of this information sheet is to inform residents, landowners and others who may be directly affected by a proposed cycle route together with decision makers such as councillors and transport planners.

Where a new cycle route is proposed, what impact is it likely to have on adjacent landowners and people who live near to the route? The initial perception among residents, householders and landowners is often that any effects will be negative, leading to an increase in noise and trespass, a loss of privacy and security and, perhaps, a reduction in property values.

To find out if this is a true picture, Sustrans commissioned independent research (1) to survey the opinions of over 100 landowners and residents adjacent to long established cycle paths and to review the values of neighbouring properties.

Four paths, open to the public for between 9 and 19 years and from

different parts of the country, were selected: The Bristol to Bath Railway Path, The Tarka Trail in North Devon, The Cuckoo Trail in East Sussex and The York to Selby path. They all run through a variety of urban and rural areas. Adjacent land uses include residential, industrial and agricultural.

Three key findings of the research were:

- **People who live close to a cycle path do not suffer problems and most actually enjoy having the facility nearby.**
- **Landowners who have a path on, or adjacent to their land, reported that they had no problems or, at worst, a few minor ones. They are generally proud of the path and support its continued use.**
- **The overwhelming majority of people who use cycle paths do so properly and considerately and provide no cause for complaint.**

**"I think it is great to have the Trail so close to us. I use it almost every day for cycling and we often take the children out on it."**

*Mike Gilbert, Little Marland Farm, Petrockstowe.*

## PROPERTY VALUES

Would proximity to a cycle path increase or decrease the value of a house?

20% of homeowners thought the path would marginally increase the value of their property, 66% thought it would have no effect and 14% felt there would be a slight reduction.

Estate agents and valuers, who have broad experience of a local market and can be expected to be objective about prices, were also surveyed. Their opinion was that, generally speaking, house values would be unaffected. Disturbance from a path would be less



*People of all ages use and enjoy traffic-free paths for walking and cycling.*

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than from a minor road and most houses already have some form of road nearby.

Many people, however, would cycle to work or school if a safe and convenient route was available. A path can be a significant amenity for school-age children and a useful form of exercise for adults. Estate agents in all four areas used the path as a selling point, emphasising the easy access it provided as well as the closeness of a leisure facility with a rural feel.

In very urban areas, the green finger of open space offered by a cycle path was perceived as a benefit while, in suburban districts, the convenience and the ambience of the path, which gives character to its surroundings, were seen as advantages.

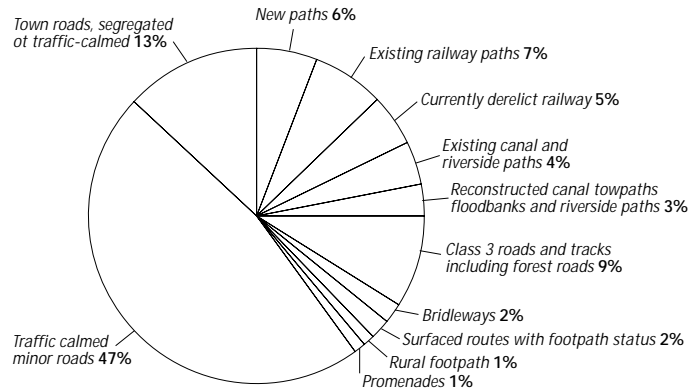
These tended to lead to an increase in the number of viewings by prospective purchasers.

An increase in house prices close to, or immediately adjacent to, a cycle path was also detected compared with similar houses further away. In the lower price bands, £30,000 to £50,000, the effects were perceived as marginal, although often increasing saleability. At higher prices, with family houses in the range of £90,000 to £110,000, the impacts were greater and in York, for instance, could lead to an increase of up to 10% in the price of a house.



Cycle paths near houses tend to enhance property values because the perceived advantages of being close to a route outweigh any disadvantages.

## National Cycle Network by Route Type



**"We have only recently sold this property and I think the fact that there is an access point on to the cycle path nearby helped to sell the property. I suppose it depends on the person".**

*Mary Lewis,  
Station Close, Bristol.*

**"Cycling is very popular around here and the Tarka Trail is well known. Close proximity to the Tarka Trail, in my opinion, would help to sell a property".**

*Mark Hobbs, Robinson Cook  
Estate Agents, Barnstaple.*

**"We certainly regard easy access to the Cuckoo Trail as a bonus when selling property in Heathfield. There are many cases of the path passing directly behind a property providing easy access to the local shops and schools".**

*Julie Blunden,  
Halifax Property, Heathfield.*

**"I would say that the Bristol to Bath path has a positive influence on the saleability of a property. Of course, like many factors, it depends on the characteristics and preferences of the potential buyer. However, most people seem to be intrigued and excited at the prospect of living next to it".**

*Tony: Negotiator,  
Besley Hill Estate Agents, Bristol.*

**"If the property is directly backing on to the cycle path I suppose it could have a negative effect. But if, as in the case you mention, the property is situated in a cul-de-sac with good access to the path then it can only be regarded positively".**

*Peter Docra,  
Ashtons Estate Agents, York.*

## COMMUNITY BENEFITS

The benefits of traffic-free paths for local communities are wide ranging and well established. The research showed that more than 90% of the local residents interviewed use the cycle paths in their vicinity for both commuting and leisure. As would be expected those residents, who live closest to the paths, use them most.



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Off road paths offer a tranquil environment which is particularly appreciated by people with mobility impairment and wheelchair users.

Some routes also serve as safe routes to school. "Best practice" schemes bring together children, parents, teachers and governors with local residents, councillors and transport planners, and are a good example of community involvement.

**"I used to use it every day to get to work until I was made redundant. Now I use it for recreation and to get to the village. My children love it"**

*Resident, adjacent to Bristol Path.*

In addition to the immediate benefits there are also the broader opportunities that a cycle route offers to the communities along it, particularly the promotion of sustainable travel, improving health and fitness and providing links not only to local facilities but to further destinations.

**"We have a good relationship with the path. It attracts a lot of business for us and it provides a safe route to work for a number of our staff who have learning difficulties."**

*Adam Myers, Brunswick Organic Nursery.*

A new cycle route will bring new people to an area, but again the research suggests that this is often more of a benefit to a community than a problem. There is a clear evidence that cycle tourism generates substantial additional trade for local shops, pubs, bed and breakfast accommodation and hotels.



*Cycle tourism can generate substantial trade for local business, as here at the "Bird in Hand", Saltford*



*The absence of motor traffic means that cycle paths are ideal places for children to learn to cycle safely and gain confidence*

**"We really enjoy being next to the Bristol to Bath Cycle Path. It attracts a lot of business for us. We are planning to build an extension which will include cycle racks and other facilities for cyclists.."**

*The Dolphin Inn, Bath.*

**"Our residents like to use the path a lot. We include the Tarka Trail in our advertising and we certainly benefit from being close to it."**

*Margaret, Royal Hotel, Bideford.*

**"The path is very good for business, our residents use it to get into town."**

*Mr Churchill, Bath Marina and Caravan Park.*

**"We benefit from the path in many ways. We sell a lot of drinks and snacks to cyclists in the summer months."**

*Mr Sheppard, Instow Post Office, Bideford.*

before. Often the area of land had been derelict or poorly maintained and unusable for much of the year.

**"Before the path was taken over by Sustrans it was just wild and overgrown. Now it is properly maintained it is much more attractive."**

*Mrs Trott, Shortwood, Bristol.*

The research showed that the only concern here was when fresh tarmac was laid, because of a perceived urbanisation of the countryside. Such opinion appears to change soon after a new path has been laid as the black surface does oxidise to grey and become less stark as grass and mosses colonise the verges. In time, the appearance is very similar to a narrow country lane. In some situations local stone is incorporated into the final finished surface to provide a more natural finish. In all cases there must be a compromise between the immediate visual impact, durability and the function of the surface.

## VISUAL EFFECTS

The appearance of a path is important to many people. In general paths designed by Sustrans have been well received. Most residents commented that the paths were a great improvement on what had been there

A notable feature of the National Cycle Network is good landscaping to create visual interest and variety. People particularly appreciate the natural vegetation that screens many of the paths. In addition, residents, particularly the elderly, have commented on the visual interest the path provides.

**"People often think that elderly people like nothing better than to stare out at grass and trees where nothing ever happens. I live right next to the cycle path and I really enjoy watching people pass by, it is a source of constant activity".**

*Mrs Attenborough,  
Castle Court, Bath.*

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*Cycle paths are designed to be as safe and attractive as possible and are fenced to prevent trespass onto neighbouring property.*

## NOISE

The noise of cyclists and other users of the National Cycle Network was rarely regarded as significant by those interviewed. In fact most people, who expressed an opinion on noise levels, said that they liked the sound that came from the path users.

**"The only noise we hear is happy noise."**

*Ms Eastman, Station Close, Bristol.*

**"I like the sound of the cyclists passing our house, it sounds like the buzzing of bees. It is relaxing."**

*Mrs Lloyd, Claybottom, Bristol.*

5% of people questioned said noise was occasionally a difficulty, usually due to isolated incidents of illegal use of motorbikes on the path, a problem best addressed by targeted policing.

## PRIVACY

Privacy is very important and people guard it fiercely. Occasionally paths pass close to houses and, where a house would otherwise be overlooked, a screen such as a fence or hedges may be necessary.

The survey found that:

- **None of the respondents reported that privacy was reduced by the cycle path to a "very great extent". Only 6% said they felt it had reduced privacy significantly.**
- **Nearly 70% felt that use of the path had little or no effect on their feelings of privacy.**

**"We really enjoy living on the cycle path. I think people are too busy enjoying themselves to take any notice of our place. I don't think that our privacy has been invaded at all."**

*Mr Shaw, Bryer Way,  
Shortwood, Bristol.*

When a new path is proposed, all residents close to the path are consulted, whether or not a legal agreement to use their land is required. By careful consultation at this early stage, all reasonable requirements by residents can be incorporated into the design of the path. Various measures may be possible, for example, deviating the path further away from certain properties, erecting new close-boarded fencing or an earth bund as a screen or lowering the path.

It is possible to prevent not only users of the path from looking into properties or their gardens but also to make passers by on the path invisible from the property. In consultation with residents, the ideal design height can be agreed - not too high to cut out light or views but high enough to adequately screen the path. A close boarded timber fence 1.8m high is usually a sufficient screen and in some cases, where the path is on lower land, a reduced height is adequate.

Planting to create a hedge is also an effective screen which is denser in the summer months when path use is greater. A mixture of plants is ideal including evergreens to maintain continuous cover. Thorny species are also effective at preventing trespassers but these must not be sited immediately adjacent to the path because cuttings can cause punctures.

All accommodation works such as these are completed at no cost to adjoining owners.

**"It is a little piece of countryside in the middle of the city."**

*Resident, adjacent to  
the Tarka Trail.*

## TRESPASS AND SECURITY

One of the most common objections to a new cycle route is the perceived possibility of trespass. Where a path is well sign-posted, however, and boundaries clearly defined, the survey has shown there are rarely problems in practice. Over 95% of respondents have never experienced any incidence of trespass. Any incidents arising tended to be minor trespass where path users have crossed private land to gain access to paths and not where the path has been used to access private land.

**"There are no problems as long as people stick to the Trail. I am all in favour of providing access to the countryside as long as people respect private land and property. I reckon it's a good thing because it brings money into the village, people use the shops and pubs."**

*Mr Dart, Winscott Farm,  
Petrockstowe, Devon.*

Some farmers see new routes as a way of reducing trespass, for many walkers and cyclists are attracted to the smooth, level cycle routes where they know they cannot get lost, thus reducing pressure on more sensitive paths.

**"We do not have any trouble with trespassers at all. In fact I would say that The Tarka Trail has taken pressure off the other, more sensitive footpaths in this area. We have no problems at all with it."**

*Mr Roy Steer, Buttstone Farm, Petrockstowe.*

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*There is no evidence that cycle paths contribute to crime in areas adjacent to them either in urban or rural locations.*

There is little to suggest that the cycle routes have a significant effect on the crime rate. None of the people questioned said crime was a regular occurrence but 30% of respondents thought that a path could be a quick escape route for petty criminals, or had created a new access and might contribute to increased crime, although there is no evidence for this. Where crime had increased, those questioned admitted that this tended to be in areas where crime was already at a high level and could not be directly attributable to the path. Thus the fear of crime is higher than its actual occurrence.

**"I have got no complaints about the path users, they are a good bunch."**

*Mr Leaf, Glade Farm, York.*

In quiet residential areas, the introduction of a cycle route can actually improve security by increasing the level of movement in the street and hence the informal surveillance of properties. Generally it is preferable to have cycle routes in front of houses rather than at the rear, and to use public space rather than private or semi-private areas. (2)

Rural residents did not associate the path with crime(1).

**"This close has had a number of burglaries because most people go out to work during the day. Since the cycle path has been in place there are a lot more people using the close and this may act as a deterrent to burglars."**

*Mrs Hartigan, Freshfield Close, Horham.*

Some employers cited the benefits of staff being able to cycle to work but others blamed the path for vandalism and theft. Improved security measures will be necessary at some premises to allay these concerns. Such security problems need to be seen in their wider, community, context; for not all are the result of introducing a cycle route and not all can be addressed by design and management of the route (2).

## LIVESTOCK AND FARMING

Farmers concerns about livestock are understandable, but problems are very seldom a direct result of a new cycle path. When pressed about livestock

worrying, most farmers said that they did not have any problems with dogs or other nuisances. Good fencing can stop dogs from straying and when constructing a new route, all reasonable measures need to be taken to reduce potential problems. Before a new path is opened to the public, Sustrans and its Local Authority partner will ensure that the landowner is completely satisfied as to the design of accommodation works such as cattle crossings, fences and gates.

**"I used to have some trouble with dogs getting on my land but since a fence was put up by Sustrans I have had no trouble at all".**

*Mr Jarvis, Nevilles Farm, Heathfield.*

**"Sustrans was very responsive to my needs generally and in providing fencing and gateways to lessen the impact on my farming tenant. The use of this route by cyclists and walkers is unlikely to have any significant effect on the wildlife, conservation and sporting value of the land or to interfere with the farming of the adjoining land."**

*Simon Rittner, a land owner at Midford, near Bath.*



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*The "wind-blown gate", an access control designed to contain livestock and deter illegal motorcycle use while permitting walkers, cyclists and wheelchairs. Access controls need not be of uniform design and so can be designed to be visually interesting and appropriate to the location.*



The Cuckoo Trail where close but separate paths cater for horse riders as well as walkers and cyclists.

**"The cycle route which crosses the Estate provides 'managed' access to the countryside which must be the way forward to meet the ever-increasing urban demands of those wanting to enjoy the countryside. I hope landowners throughout the British Isles will support Sustrans to establish the National Cycle Network".**

*The Earl of Shelburne,  
Bowood House, Calne, Wiltshire.*

a permanence, often missing in an otherwise changeable agrarian landscape, providing secure foraging areas and acting as corridors. These allow many species to move safely from one habitat patch to another, thus assisting their natural spread and ensuring genetic diversity. Walking and cycling have little impact on wildlife although it is important that dogs are kept in check.

Evidence from local schools suggests that cycle paths are an excellent environmental education resource while local residents find them a

reservoir for birds, butterflies and other animals which can be such pleasurable visitors to their gardens.

**"In less space than a mile we had passed traces of dry grassland, marsh, hay meadow, heathland, scrub and forest habitat" (5).**

Sustrans also produces the information sheet: "Ways for Wildlife" (3) and retains wildlife consultants to advise and guide it.

**"I have supported the idea from the start. I was involved in the opening celebrations five years ago. The experience of living next door to the path has been more rewarding than I imagined, there is more wildlife now as a result of the path, and I have met some lovely people."**

*Mr Terry,  
Railway Cottage,  
Hailsham, Sussex*

## WILDLIFE

The effect of the growth in motor traffic and its harmful emissions on the climate is now an accepted fact which poses one of the greatest threats to Britain's valuable wildlife. Encouraging the use of bicycles for utility and leisure trips is one important measure to help tackle this threat by reducing the number of short car journeys which tend to be the most polluting.

**"I think it is lovely, the hedgerows and trees attract a lot of wildlife. It is a little piece of countryside in the middle of the city."**

*Resident, adjacent to the Tarka Trail.*

Long established and well-managed traffic-free paths provide an excellent environment for a wide diversity of plants and animals. Such features have

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ROUTES FOR PEOPLE

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**Monday - Friday 8.30am - 5.30pm  
Saturdays 10.00am - 2.00pm  
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We are grateful to all those who have contributed to the development of this document and welcome further comments, which should be addressed to Mark Tucker at Sustrans.

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