

(by email)

As a voluntary campaigner in Peterborough for better non-car access, and as part-time worker for Sustrans, developing the National Cycle Network in Huntingdonshire, my experience is:

Although Local Plans contain policies to improve cycle and pedestrian access, these tend to be given low priority in implementation.

Generally, because the developer makes the proposal, there is a tendency for the often overworked planning officer to go along with the less-than-ideal provision for non-car access in the initial drawings. The planning officer, and even the traffic engineers responsible for assessing the designs, may have little knowledge of cycle or pedestrian needs or of opportunities for good links to the surroundings.

The drawings of a development proposal are very often produced by engineers or consultants from far away, who have little or no idea of the existing pedestrian and cycle access from the surrounding area. I can quote a recent shopping development close to my home where it was evident that there was confusion as to whether to link cyclists to the road or to good local off-road provision, and despite my timely comments the design was not corrected.

The developer, being seen by local council and media in the role of bringer of prosperity, can, it would appear, threaten to withdraw if he is pressed too far to provide high quality non-car access. So planning staff are it seems allowed or encouraged by council members to "cave in".

In particular, planning staff may say that they cannot ask a developer to improve cycle and pedestrian links off-site. This even if there is limited space for car parking on site.

Local authority transport planning staff seem usually to have more enthusiasm for providing good road access than good quality pedestrian and cycle access. It would seem they have little feel for the needs of pedestrians and cyclists.

In my work for Sustrans I sometimes find myself having to make planning applications to "retrofit" pedestrian and cycle access to a development for which, if local transport policies for "green" access had been properly implemented, the work would have been required of the developer.

I am currently working on just such a case, for which a draft Urban Design Framework for the area of a development of 300 houses was out for consultation a year ago but neither the County's Cycling Project Officer nor Sustrans were advised or consulted. Under county and district transport policies the development should have been given good disabled and cycle access to its scenic village hinterland, and on to the principal town, but it may now only have footpath access unsuitable for cycles or the disabled. At the same time all the new dwellings will be adding to car traffic on an already busy road adjacent to a market town, traffic which could be reduced if good quality cycle infrastructure were provided.

All the above gives me to believe that social equality and disabled access needs are quite often not being met.

I hope this will be of use. Do ask if you require more evidence.

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