

Cycling After Dark in Stevenage

Does the cycleway network feel safe to use after dark?

A report by women from Cycling UK Stevenage Campaigns



Martins Way viewed from North Road bridge by day...



...and after dark.

The national Cycling UK My Ride. Our Right campaign was started because women make half as many cycle trips as men and are more likely to be put off cycling by fears of busy traffic or harassment.

Stevenage has an extensive cycle network that enables traffic-free cycling for leisure and utility journeys alike. However, after dark, the cycleway network becomes a far less welcoming place to be.

Social Safety Audit

During Autumn 2026, women from Cycling UK Stevenage Campaigns conducted an audit of social safety on 48 km (30 miles) of the main cycleway network. For each section of cycleway visited after dark, the following aspects of social safety were considered:

- **Surveillance and Activity** - Natural surveillance from the surrounding environment throughout the day and night.
- **Forward Visibility and Escape Routes** - Effect of topography, vegetation and built environment on perceived and actual risk of crime.
- **Visibility of Others** - Effect of lighting and street furniture on perceived and actual risk of crime.

Each aspect was given a Red, Amber or Green rating to indicate serious, some or no concerns.

A route section was given an overall rating based on the worst rating assigned for any of the 3 aspects.

Key Findings

There was at least some concern about at least one aspect of social safety on 80% of the distance surveyed – only 20% of the network felt completely safe.

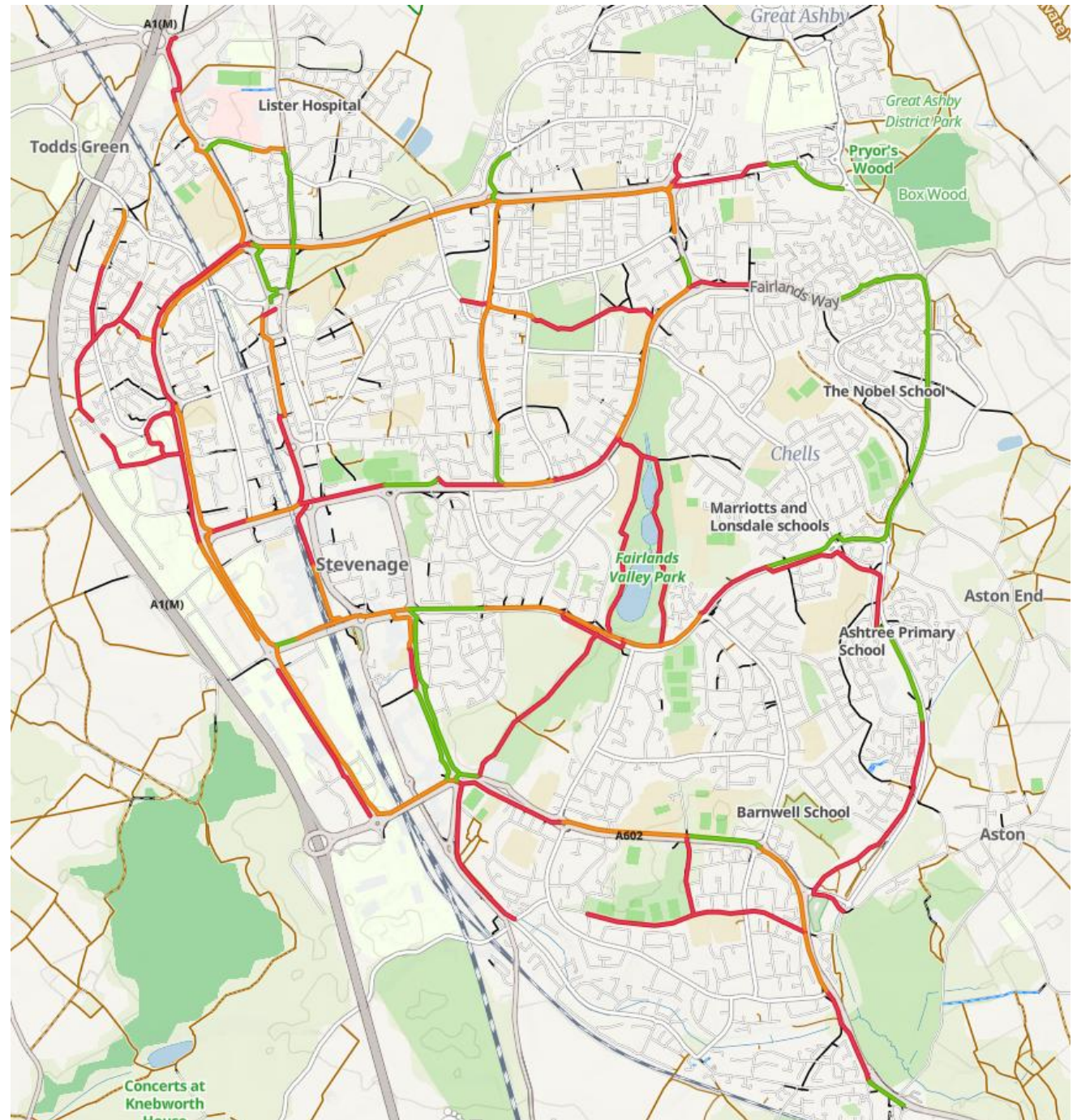
There were serious concerns about aspects of social safety on over 40% of the distance surveyed. This included 90% of the surveyed routes through parks and on shared use paths away from roads.

This map shows the overall rating assigned to each section of cycleway audited.

See the [Cycling UK Stevenage](#) website for full methodology and results along with an interactive version of the map.

Key Issues

1. Design – including infrastructure, lighting and vegetation
2. Underpass lighting contrast with adjacent areas
3. Routes through parks, “Old Lanes” and woodland



Key Issue 1 - Design – including infrastructure, lighting and vegetation

Most of the cycleway network has no dedicated lighting, but instead relies on light from LED streetlights on adjacent roads. Lights on the edge of roads face away from the cycleway; lights on the central reservation are further from the cycleway.

In many places, the cycleway alongside a road rises or drops away from the lit road carriageway.

Concrete road retaining walls, bridges and other infrastructure create narrow enclosed spaces with dark shadows, ambush points and no escape routes.

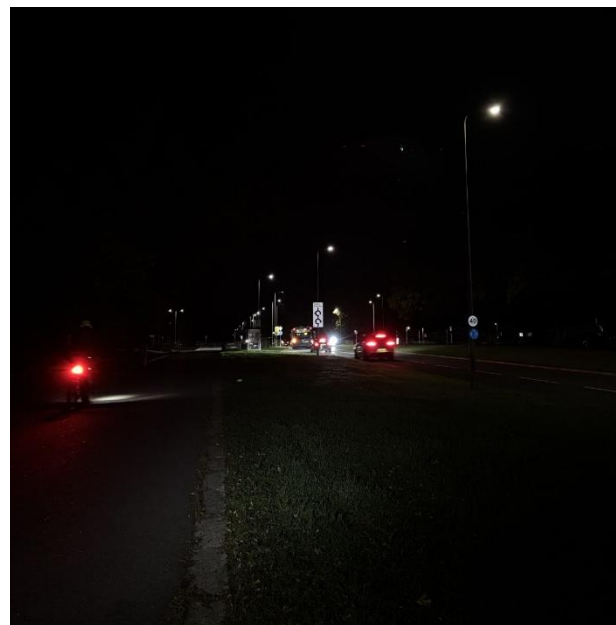
Trees and overgrown vegetation alongside cycleways obscure light and create areas of darkness and shadow.

With no cycleway lighting, car headlights are very dazzling; once the car has passed, there is complete darkness.

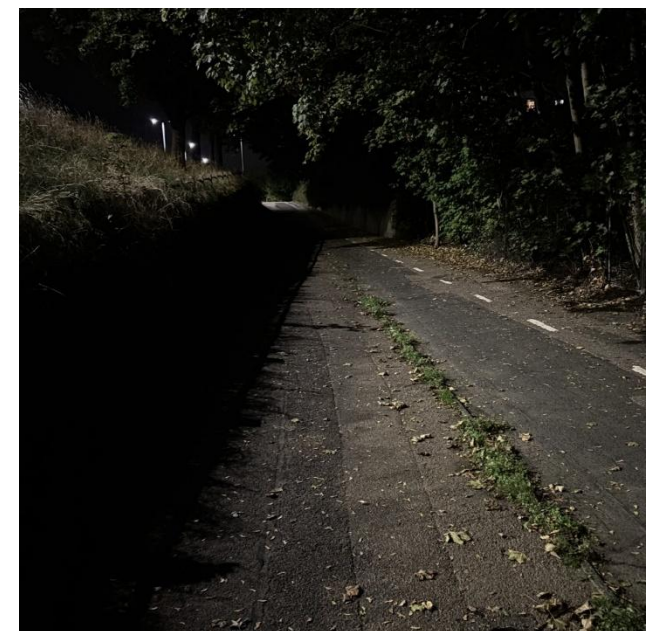
“Riding up Fairlands Way is not pleasant especially on my own. There are many places where the cycle paths are relying on road streetlights to light them. Light is blocked by trees and there are pitch black parts. It is the main cycle way up to Chells Manor, but I ride as fast as I can because I hate the dark parts and feeling vulnerable.”



Monkswood Way



Fairlands Way



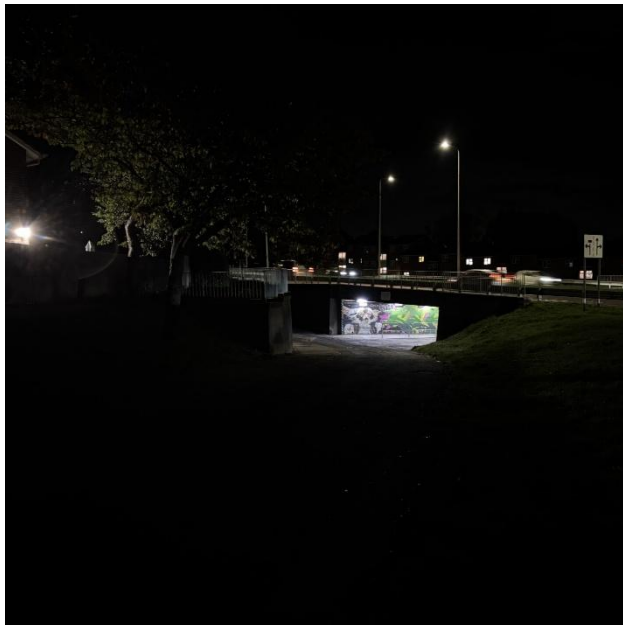
Gunnells Wood Road

Key Issue 2 – Underpass lighting contrast with adjacent areas

Many underpasses now have very bright lighting, but the cycleway just outside is barely lit. On leaving an underpass, a person cycling is effectively plunged into darkness as their eyes cannot adjust to the change of lighting.

This accentuates concerns about passing through roundabout junctions and multiple underpasses with poor visibility. The darkness just outside each underpass creates shadows so it is very difficult to see if there is anyone there.

Light meters were used to collect data about the intensity of lighting across the cycleway network. See [map](#) for findings.



Fairlands Way at Popple Way



Lytton Way at Briggs Close



Grace Way near Sish Lane

“Riding home I go through a brightly lit underpass under Broadhall Way then into the deep darkness. I turn on my powerful beam to help me see into the space and speed up! The turn off the cycleway into my road is really hard to find in the pitch dark, especially since the tree on the corner was felled.”

“Travelling on a very late train with my bike, I thought about my route home from Stevenage station. There would be several sets of underpasses and nearby dark places that were impossible to avoid. I decided to get off at Knebworth and use the main road to get back instead.”

Key Issue 3 - Routes through parks, “Old Lanes” and woodland

The Stevenage cycleway network was primarily designed to enable journeys from homes to workplaces in the industrial area and town centre with radial cycle routes, many of which run east-west across the town.

Many other routes between neighbourhoods rely on shared paths across parks such as Fairlands Valley Park. Other traffic-free shared use paths follow “old lane” routes that pre-date the new town such as Symonds Green Lane and Shephall Lane. Routes are often dark and secluded with poor sightlines and visibility; some are very overgrown with variable surfaces.

Women often have caring responsibilities, and work elsewhere and at different times, often making multi-step journeys other than the traditional commute. Routes through green spaces are a joy to use in daylight but do not feel safe after dark.

Even with more lighting, the social safety of remote routes may not be fully addressed unless better lighting leads to more usage – and thus surveillance.

Avoiding key routes through parks and old lanes can involve lengthy detours or use of busy roads. Moving between road and cycleway sections of a journey can involve tricky junctions in heavy traffic – which may be close to main road roundabouts.



Meadway / Clovelly Way link by day...



... and after dark.

I usually cut through Fairlands Valley Park on my way home, but once it's dark, I go up the big hill cycleway next to the junction with Valley Way. I'm scared riding that section and feel a big relief once I've passed the park.

When it's too dark to go through the park, I use Chells Way and Shephall Way. For both, turning right at the bottom to rejoin the cycleway is very daunting - especially in the dark at rush hour.

Summary

Then...

The Stevenage cycleway network was a unique innovation when the new town was built nearly 80 years ago. The segregated cycleways and systems of underpasses and junctions were designed so that people could cycle considerable parts of journeys in a safer traffic-free environment.

Now...

To enable more cycling journeys in Stevenage, there must be a high-quality network that is safe and convenient for **everyone** to use. It must be inclusive for everyone to feel comfortable using it to cycle, not just in summer sunshine, but after dark and in winter too.

The brand-new infrastructure – the cycleway on North Road and the shared use path on Gresley Way - meets more modern expectations and feels more socially safe to use. This report identifies places where changes are needed to our older cycleways to improve social safety for people cycling across the town.

For example, where:

- Lighting could be added or adjusted.
- Vegetation needs to be maintained.
- Alternative safe routes on roads need to be established as alternatives to secluded routes.

Improvements for social safety are essential for cycling in Stevenage to be a practical choice for everyday journeys in the 21st century after dark as well as during the day.

Acknowledgements

Cycling UK Stevenage Campaigns thank the London Cycling Campaign Women's Network for both inspiration and practical help. This project was initially inspired by the LCC Women's Freedom After Dark report published in February 2025.

Thank you to the women in Stevenage who gave up their time on dark evenings to help with this audit.

[Cycling UK Stevenage Campaigns](#)

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Gresley Way near Ridlins Stadium by day...



...and after dark



Cycling in traffic on an alternative route