



How to take your council candidate for a bike ride

Guide for local cycling campaigners

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1. Introduction

Local council elections see people standing to represent a relatively small patch – across the UK, the average number of people in a ward is 5,500.

Councillors are responsible for a broad range of issues. Cycling comes under the ‘active travel’ banner, but they’ll additionally be concerned with transport, planning, education and more. Candidates for election should have a good understanding of the characteristics of their local neighbourhoods, however they may not know much about the issues around active travel, and they may not be aware of the potential it has to make a positive difference in the community. We can help them understand how it can solve local problems such as school run congestion, rat-running through housing estates, and air pollution.

Taking election candidates on a bike ride will enable them see things from a fresh perspective.

2. Why do it

Candidates want to get elected and you’re the ones who elect them.

At a ward level every vote counts; seats and in turn whole authorities can be won and lost with just a handful of votes.

Candidates don’t just want to get elected, they want to bring about positive change and whilst there may be different priorities and debate about what better looks like, they are standing for election as they want to improve things for the people in the place where they live.

As someone who wants to improve things for cycling this is an opportunity for you to influence, to raise awareness of issues and point out what they could do to make the area better and why they might get your vote if they support you.

Candidates who don’t cycle might not understand some of the barriers and experiencing things first-hand is a powerful way to explain something.

For example, if they are being barraged by complaints about a lack of car parking space around a school you can offer solutions that they may not have thought about, such as school streets and cycle parking in the school.

3. Who should you take?

All councillors and candidates need to hear from cycling advocates.

Don’t just invite the candidates who already support your cause. Whilst it’s great to let the active travel champions and everyday cycling candidates know that their support for cycling may sway votes, they may not be the winning candidate.

Invite candidates from across the political spectrum. Don’t assume that just because their national party’s policy is for (or against) cycling and active travel, they will agree. Their personal views may well differ from the party line and can be influenced by local relationships.

Do some research into each candidate – many will have set up social media accounts as part of their election campaign – and use what you discover to get them interested in riding with you.

There can be a lot of candidates standing in a ward, and you may not be able to ride with all of them. That's fine. If you are part of a local campaigning group, you'll probably want to stay politically neutral, so approaching candidates from a range of parties can prevent unwanted perceptions of bias.

4. What and where

Show them what matters to you within the ward.

Check your local authority's website to find maps of ward boundaries. If you've got an example of some infrastructure or other measure that works well then start off with showing them something positive.

If there is nowhere to park your bike near the local shops ride around in search of the nearest spot and discuss the benefits to local businesses when you can park up outside.

If you want to be able to use a cut-through that has a gate you can't get through on your cargo bike then take them the long way round to show how inconvenient it is.

5. How

By bike or on foot, on your own or with others.

There's nothing quite like getting about by bike, so if your candidate is comfortable riding around then this is the best way to get your point across. However, not everyone will be in a position to ride around so walk and talk is fine and can be less stressful than cycling around a particularly challenging area.

If you are part of a group or have friends you can call on, you could arrange for the candidate to meet several other people on the ride that (would like to) get around by bike - parents/disabled riders/children/commuters/leisure riders/shoppers – so they understand a range of views.

6. When

Meet at the time of day will allow you to best illustrate your point.

If a junction is difficult to cross at commuter times invite them to join you during rush hour. If you want to make the case for 'school streets' don't do it midmorning but arrange to meet at dropping off or pick up time.

If they cannot make that 'best' time, meet at a different time but show them a pre-recorded video to demonstrate the difference.

7. What next?

If you can get a photo of the ride, share it on social media or find other ways to let people know it's happened as that will promote further conversation on the subject. Encourage others to talk to candidates about their experiences with cycling and active travel, so that they understand it's an important issue to a range of people.

If one of the candidates you went on a ride with gets elected, continue the conversation with them and develop your relationship. You can hold them to account for any promises they made. Stay in contact with the 'unsuccessful' candidates - they may well become allies in your ongoing local campaigning... and they may stand again in future elections.

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