

**Open letter to Chief Constable Shawn Sawyer
and Police & Crime Commissioner Alison Hernandez from
the Exeter Cycling Campaign**



The Exeter Cycling Campaign has been encouraged to hear that plans are to be put in place by Devon and Cornwall Police to collect and process video evidence and recruit additional traffic officers for the area. We've seen how similar actions have reduced dangerous close passes by up to 50% in other areas of the UK,

The Exeter Cycling Campaign is a group of over 600 Exeter citizens committed to enabling safe cycling for people of all ages and abilities, so children can cycle to school and adults can safely cycle for their normal daily activities.

Whilst we support your actions to improve the way your Force processes third party video evidence we are greatly concerned about a number of other areas and wish to highlight these for your attention. The Campaign has heard from numerous people cycling that there is a growing level of intimidation of vulnerable road users and driving that is below the level that should be expected. Many collisions have occurred this summer to experienced riders, including several National Standard for Cycling instructors, despite taking all appropriate precautions to address their own safety on the roads.

Furthermore, we are concerned with the way Devon and Cornwall Police are currently inadequately and inconsistently addressing the near misses, intimidation and collisions suffered by people cycling.

These concerns include:

- A lack of understanding and support from Officers for vulnerable road users.
- Inadequate and inconsistent communications, recording, and follow up, resulting in victims feeling abandoned by the police.
- We learn that police officers are using phraseology that lays blame on the victims:
"But it is hard to spot cyclists"
"The driver said you were speeding" (12mph in a 30mph zone)
"Well, you can replace the bike"
- Officers appear to be unaware of National Cycling Standards, for example, in regards to best practice for safe road positioning.
- We understand reports that should have been filed by the investigating officer are not reaching the Collisions Unit. The Collisions Unit appears not to have a facility to identify that these have not been received.
- There appears to be a lack of will to follow through and prosecute incidents to ensure that drivers face appropriate sanctions for their actions on the road. Driver training as a remedy clearly has a place but seems to be used too readily, even when severe injuries have been sustained.

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- Driver awareness courses are reported to pay scant regard to the need for extra attention needed around vulnerable road users and the appropriate amount of space to afford them on the road. Furthermore, these courses are reported as not insisting on positive engagement from participants and there is no possibility of failing the course if an incorrect attitude is demonstrated.
- Citizens are unable to carry out their lawful right to cycle on the roads because of the intimidating behaviour of drivers.
- Speed limits in the centre of Exeter are not policed effectively. We know that nationally 80% of drivers speed in 20mph zones and this is likely to be the case in Exeter.

These factors together suggest officers have not been trained to overcome the car-centric view of the roads held by wider society and to appreciate the vulnerability of people cycling on the road network. These institutionally car-ist attitudes need addressing with the same system-wide effort and leadership that police forces have given in the past to correct their approach to racism and sexual abuse.

In the light of these observations we call for Devon & Cornwall Police to urgently consider and address these areas that we have raised with both the Chief Constable and Police and Crime Commissioner on previous occasions. Namely that:

1. To acknowledge that being prevented from cycling due to fear is a police matter.
2. Formally recognise that people walking & cycling are vulnerable in the context of both regular road use and if involved in motor vehicle collisions.
3. Take a zero tolerance approach to aggression and intimidation directed at people cycling.
4. Lead on the culture change required within Devon & Cornwall Police to achieve these.
5. Fully adopt and regularly deliver West Midlands Police's approach in proactively tackling poor driving around people cycling.
6. Offer full police support for 20mph as an appropriate maximum speed in urban areas.
7. Ensure that all Officers and Police Staff who receive or attend reports of intimidation or collisions are trained in the National Standard for Cycling and understand the vulnerability and needs of a cyclist when they have been victimised, assaulted or been in collision with a motor vehicle.

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8. Adapt Devon & Cornwall Police's road traffic collision processes, FAQ, information leaflets and fees to meet the needs of people cycling involved in an incident.

The Exeter Cycling Campaign is committed to engaging positively with the Councils and police and we would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you further.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Biddy Walton Exeter Cycling Campaign steering group

Caspar Hughes Exeter Cycling Campaign steering group

Graham Heysett Exeter Cycling Campaign steering group, qualified National Standard for Cycling Instructor, British Cycling and Sustrans trained Ride Leader, Sustrans Ranger and recent victim of a road collision

Dave Godwin National Standard for Cycling Instructor, Sustrans trained Ride Leader, and recent victim of a road collision

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