

Brief for Commissioning a Pedestrian and Active Travel Safety Audit of Totnes Old Bridge

14th May 2026

1. Introduction and Purpose

Totnes Town Council intends to commission an independent pedestrian and active travel safety audit of the Old Bridge connecting Bridgetown and the Old Town. This audit will form the first evidence-gathering step in understanding safety, accessibility and risk for pedestrians and other vulnerable road users on the bridge and its immediate approaches, including for people on foot and those using wheeled mobility aids.

The purpose of the audit is not to develop or recommend design solutions, infrastructure changes or traffic orders at this stage. Instead, it is to establish a robust, independent evidence base on:

- the nature, range and severity of safety issues experienced by pedestrians and other non-motorised users
- how these issues affect different groups, including children, older people and disabled people
- how the bridge functions in practice for everyday journeys throughout a typical day, including people on foot, those cycling, and those using wheeled mobility aids

The audit should recognise that both pedestrians and cyclists are vulnerable road users within the transport system, while also acknowledging the potential for conflict and mutual risk between them in constrained environments.

This evidence will enable the Town Council to determine whether further work is required and, if so, what form that work should take.

2. Strategic and Policy Context

2.1 National context

The audit should be undertaken with reference to the Department for Transport's Road Safety Strategy (January 2026), which establishes a renewed national approach to reducing death and serious injury on the road network.

The strategy places the Safe System approach at its core, recognising that while human error is inevitable, serious injury and death are not, and that responsibility for safety lies across the whole system, including infrastructure, vehicles, speeds and road user behaviour.

In particular, the strategy emphasises:

- the prioritisation of vulnerable road users, particularly pedestrians, cyclists, disabled and elderly people and children

- the need for a “safety-first” approach in the design, management and improvement of both existing infrastructure and new schemes
- the expectation that authorities proactively identify and address safety and accessibility risks across the existing highway network
- the importance of inclusive design, equality duties and the Public Sector Equality Duty

The audit should situate its findings within this broader policy context, without advocating specific interventions.

2.2 Local context

Totnes presents particular challenges for pedestrian safety due to:

- its historic street pattern, narrow pavements and constrained crossing points
- limited crossings of the River Dart, which concentrate pedestrian and vehicular movements
- significant volumes of through-traffic using the Old Bridge as part of east–west and north–south movements, including vehicles travelling towards Plymouth, Dartmouth and Kingsbridge
- increasing housing growth within Totnes’ wider travel-to-work area, including Torbay, which places additional pressure on river crossings

For local residents, the Old Bridge is a key everyday route, including for children walking to and from school. The audit should recognise this context while remaining focused on observed conditions and risks rather than assumptions about causation or solutions.

3. Scope of the Audit

The commission will include a pedestrian and active travel safety audit focused on:

- Totnes Old Bridge carriageway and footways
- immediate approach areas on both the Bridgetown and Old Town sides where pedestrian–vehicle interaction is directly affected by bridge use

The audit should address the experience of:

- pedestrians of all ages
- disabled people and people with reduced mobility or sensory impairments
- users of mobility aids, including wheelchairs and mobility scooters
- cyclists
- children travelling independently or accompanied
- people with prams / buggies

The audit should explicitly recognise that while pedestrians and cyclists are both vulnerable road users in relation to motor traffic, there can also be safety risks arising from interactions between them, particularly in constrained or shared environments. The assessment should therefore consider both the vulnerability of each group and the potential for conflict between them, with a focus on observable behaviour, risk, and user experience.

Motor traffic is within scope only insofar as it affects safety and accessibility for pedestrians, cyclists and other vulnerable road users.

4. Key Questions to Be Addressed

Without presuming outcomes, the audit is expected to provide evidence on:

- the frequency and circumstances in which pedestrians or people using mobility aids are required or choose to step into the carriageway
- observable interactions between pedestrians and passing vehicles, including conflicts or near-misses
- observable interactions between cyclists and passing vehicles, and between pedestrians and cyclists, including conflicts, near-misses, or avoidance behaviours
- the presence and impact of vehicle features such as overhanging mirrors or body width relative to available pedestrian space
- how safety and comfort vary by time of day, with particular reference to rush hours and school travel times
- how accessible and navigable the bridge environment is for people with different physical, sensory or cognitive needs
- the relationship between formal pedestrian provision and actual behaviour, including the identification of “desire lines” or informal crossing points where people choose to walk in practice
- whether conditions enable safe, independent and dignified movement for all users

5. Evidence Collection Requirements

5.1 Visual and observational evidence

The audit must be grounded in direct observation and include whole-day evidence from a typical term-time weekday, covering:

- morning and evening peak periods
- school travel times
- off-peak periods
- be undertaken in fair weather

Evidence may include annotated photographs, video stills or observational logs, subject to protection and ethical considerations. The emphasis should be on frequency and pattern, not isolated incidents.

5.2 Non-vehicular user counts and user characteristics

The audit must include counts of pedestrians (people walking and wheeling) and cyclists over the course of the day to complement existing traffic count data held by the Town Council.

Counts should, where observable and appropriate, identify broad user characteristics, such as:

- children and young people
- older people
- wheelchair or mobility scooter users
- people pushing prams or buggies
- people using walking sticks, white canes or guide dogs
- children cycling and cyclists carrying children (e.g. in trailers, cargo bikes or child seats)

This information is intended to support understanding of how different groups use the bridge and whether it supports inclusive access, not to identify individuals.

6. Equality, Accessibility and Protected Characteristics

The consultancy must demonstrate expertise in:

- pedestrian and cycling safety
- inclusive street design
- accessibility for people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act

The audit should consider how the bridge functions for people with mobility, visual or other impairments and whether observed conditions may pose disproportionate risks or barriers to safe movement.

Findings should be clearly framed in terms of access to safe, inclusive movement, rather than compliance with any single design standard.

7. Outputs and Reporting

The primary output will be a written audit report suitable for use by elected members and officers, containing:

- a clear methodology section
- factual findings supported by observational evidence and counts
- an overview of the range and severity of safety issues identified

- high-level conclusions about the importance of safety of vulnerable road users, accessibility and inclusive use of existing infrastructure

The report should not:

- propose or evaluate specific design solutions
- recommend traffic orders or engineering interventions
- cost potential measures

General, non-prescriptive conclusions (for example, on the importance of separating pedestrians from traffic, providing sufficient space for safe pedestrian movement, or enabling safe crossing opportunities) are acceptable.

8. Consultancy Requirements

The appointed consultancy should demonstrate:

- professional experience in pedestrian and active travel safety audits
- specific expertise in accessibility and disability inclusion
- an understanding of constrained historic environments
- independence from any subsequent design or delivery work, should further stages be commissioned

9. Use of the Audit

This audit will be used by Totnes Town Council to:

- inform decision-making on whether further investigation or design work is required
- support dialogue with relevant highway authorities and partners
- provide an evidence base that is transparent, proportionate and defensible

It does not imply any predetermined outcome or commitment to implementation.