South Gloucestershire Council

Delivering for you

Streetlighting proposals

Answers to your questions

Background

Street lighting helps us feel safe, but it also consumes significant energy, generating emissions of CO_2 and other harmful gases. With energy prices having risen so rapidly over the last couple of years, the cost of keeping the lights shining bright all through the night have increased substantially.

We conducted a consultation at the end of 2022 as part of our annual budget setting process asking people to consider relative support for a range of different measures designed to save the council money. One of the measures considered was to turn down the lights during the late-night period from 11pm until 6am when we see lowest levels of vehicles and pedestrians using roads and pavements. 76% of respondents expressed support for doing this, making it the most 'popular' of all 26 specific proposals offered during the consultation.

We have been trialling lights dimmed to 25% of their full capacity in some locations since January 2023 and are now proposing to push this change out across all streetlights in South Gloucestershire. Such a measure would support our green commitments and help us address the financial challenges we face - we estimate that once fully implemented, each year, this proposal would reduce our carbon emissions by a further 15% and reduce our spend on energy by £200,000 per year.

Before we progress this, we are checking in again with local people to give you a chance to comment on how we are proposing to implement the change. Please share your feedback via the consultation.

What changes are you proposing to make?

We operate streetlights following a schedule which is aligned with when most vehicles and pedestrians need them. They are brighter in the period between when the sun sets and 11pm and then again from 6am in the morning until the sun provides sufficient light for them to be turned off.

Over the last few years, as we have been rolling out more energy efficient LED lighting across South Gloucestershire, we have dimmed brightness levels to reduce energy consumption and unnecessary light pollution - most lights in South Gloucestershire are now dimmed to 50% of their full capacity late at night.

Over the next six months we will complete our transition to the most efficient LED lighting. Then over the following two years, (tied in with our ongoing maintenance programme to reduce the implementation costs), we are proposing to introduce a new schedule which continues to prioritise brightest lighting levels when most people need them but dimming the lights further between 11pm and 6am.

Time period	Lighting levels
15 minutes after sunset until 11:00pm	75%
11:00pm to 06.00am	25%
06:00am until 15 minutes before sunrise	75%

		Cost saving	Cost and complexity to implement	Potential number of people impacted (visual representation only)
OPTION 1	Maintain current plan, focusing brightest lighting before 11pm at night and after 6am in the morning and dimming most during the late night period.	£££		
OPTION 2	Bring forward the time at night (currently 11pm) when we switch lights to the lowest brightness level and reduce the level of dimming in the late night period.	£		
OPTION 3	Push back the time in the morning (currently 6am) when we switch from the lowest brightness to the brighter levels and reduce the level of dimming in the late night period.	£		
OPTION 4	Dim the lights more in the period between sunset and 11pm (we would also need to dim lights in the late night period, but by a smaller amount and/or over a shorter period).	££		
OPTION 5	Dim the lights more in the period between 6am and sunrise (we would also need to dim lights in the late night period, but by a smaller amount and/or over a shorter period).	££		
OPTION 6	Prioritise brighter lighting in some locations (we would need to dim lights in other areas by a greater amount and/or over a longer period).	£		

Would it be possible to keep brighter lighting in locations which see more pedestrians and vehicles after 11pm?

In theory this would be possible. However, this would not deliver the emissions reductions and cost savings we need to make. We would therefore have to make more significant changes in other locations. It would also be extremely complex and costly to implement.

What are the environmental benefits of this change?

We have made good progress over recent years to minimise the environmental footprint of lighting streets and pavements, primarily by updating lights with the most energy efficient LED bulbs as old lights reach the end of their natural life. Since we started the programme in 2009, we have reduced our energy consumption considerably, cutting CO2 emissions by 35,000 tonnes and saving the taxpayer over £15million.

We estimate that this new proposal will reduce our energy consumption (and emissions) by a further 15%.

What savings might be delivered through this change?

We estimate that once fully implemented that the measures outlined would save the council £200,000 per annum.

Why does the council need to make cost savings?

Like councils up and down the country, South Gloucestershire Council is facing significant financial pressures. Funding from Central Government continues to be cut at a time when demand is growing for some of our most expensive services, especially social care costs to look after the increasing numbers of older people in our society. Additionally, inflation has increased the costs of providing services – especially in areas like streetlighting where energy costs have risen dramatically.

We have a legal responsibility to deliver a balanced budget each year, covering our costs with our income and so to minimise council tax increases, we need to reduce what we spend.

Will I still be able to see at night with the lights dimmed?

We have conducted trials of the dimmed lighting in some parts of Thornbury, which from January 2023 have been operated at various levels, including the 25% brightness which we are proposing to use across all lights going forward. Respondents to this survey can visit the trial sites to see the effect of dimming lighting to various levels in the following locations:

- Patchway – Durban Road & Rodway Road
- Staple Hill – High Street & around Page Park
- Kingswood – High Street, Blackhorse Road, Cecil Road & South Road
- Filton – Church Road, Station Road & Conygre Road

- Winterbourne – Flaxpits Lane & Green Dragon Road

The streetlights in these areas have been programmed to dim to 25% late at night throughout the 12-week consultation period. To get a realistic view of how the lights will work at that brightness level, you should visit after midnight.

What happens in other areas?

Other Local Authorities share our concerns for the environment and are under similar pressure not to pass on increased energy costs to local people. We have compared our proposals with what neighbouring councils are doing or plan to do. Many already dim their lights to this level – or lower – or are planning to make similar changes shortly.

Won't this increase crime/anti-social behaviour?

We know fear of crime is a concern for many, and as part of our planning, we have engaged with the police and colleagues in our anti-social behaviour team to understand potential negative consequences of such a move. There is no evidence suggesting a direct correlation between dimming lights and crime.

However, we recognise that some people, especially women and people from some minority groups who have historically been at greater risk of being targeted by anti-social behaviour, will have concerns. With partner organisations, we will continue to assess location-based evidence and work together to reinforce messaging which reduces fear of crime.

If the proposals are progressed, when would the changes come into effect?

The council is responsible for approximately 31,500 streetlights and 2,500 lit road traffic signs and bollards. Changing the programme is very time-consuming and costly because each streetlight needs to be individually programmed, which can't be done remotely.

If a revised schedule is agreed, to minimise the resource required to update the brightness levels, we are proposing making the changes as part of our normal maintenance programme, so we do not need to visit individual streetlights multiple times.

In this scenario, we would expect to update all 31,500 lights over a two-year period starting from April 2024.