

Somerset County Council

Street Lighting Reduction Project

Frequently Asked Questions (F.A.Q's)

What is part-night lighting?

Part-night lighting is exactly as it sounds; a street light is switched off for part of the night. In line with other councils who have used this approach, the lights affected will be switched off from midnight to 5.30am.

By how much will lighting be dimmed?

Lights will be dimmed by about 50% in power. Dimming will only be carried out when traffic flows are low and when a lower level of lighting will not affect road safety.

Why can't you just dim lights instead of turning some of them off?

Not all lights can be dimmed as the equipment used to dim lights is expensive. We can only get a sufficient saving and return on our investment from the most powerful 250 watts lights. We will not be dimming less powerful lights because the dimmer units might need replacing before they have paid for themselves in terms of reduced electricity costs.

Which areas will be affected first?

Part night operation of some lights in rural locations will be starting in the summer of 2011 and dimming of street lights on main roads will happen after that.

Can we legally turn off the lights?

Yes. There is no statutory requirement on local authorities in the UK to provide public lighting, the law states that:

- The Highways Act empowers local authorities to light roads but does not place a duty to do so
- The Council has a duty of care to road users and has an obligation to light obstructions on the highway
- The Council has a statutory duty under the Highways Act to ensure the safety of the highway and this includes any lighting equipment placed on the highway
- The Electricity at Work Regulations impose a duty on owners and operators of electrical equipment to ensure its safety

Why has my street been chosen?

All street lights will be affected, apart from the following:

- Locations with a significant night-time road traffic accident record
- Areas with above-average record of crime
- Areas provided with CCTV local authority/police surveillance equipment
- Areas with sheltered housing and other residences accommodating vulnerable people.
- Areas with 24hr operational emergency services sites including hospitals.
- Formal pedestrian crossings, subways, and enclosed footpaths and alleyways where one end links to a road that is lit all night
- Where there are potential hazards on the highway (roundabouts, central carriageway islands, chicanes, speed-humps, etc.)

If a street light is switched off, won't the roads become dangerous?

Street lights at major roundabouts and junctions, at pedestrian crossings, traffic lights, speed bumps or chicanes which are needed to ensure road safety will not be selected for switching off. The vast majority of lights will only be switched off from about midnight when most drivers are not on the road, and will be switched on again around 5.30am.

Won't this just increase crime and traffic accidents within Somerset?

The evidence from other areas where these measures have been introduced, show that levels of crime and numbers of traffic accidents do not increase.

The safety and wellbeing of our residents and motorists is important and has always been the biggest consideration of this project. We will continue to work closely with the emergency services on the detailed proposals. Street lights in areas with evidence of high accident levels at night, needed for road safety reasons, in residential areas with higher crime rates, in town centres, and near sheltered housing will be excluded from the measures.

All accidents and crime in the affected areas will be closely monitored throughout the project.

Will 30mph speed limits be affected if lights are switched off?

A 30mph speed limit automatically applies in any road containing a system of street lights placed not more than 200 yards apart, unless signposted with a different speed limit.

There is no current law stating that these lights have to be switched on all night to be applicable. Therefore, motorists are advised that the usual 30mph speed limit will be in place regardless of whether the lights are switched on or not.

How can we let you know our views on the project?

A comment form has been set up encouraging residents to give their views. These comments will be used to help with monitoring the affects of the changes.