



### **Editor's Report**

What a bumper issue this turned out to be – six pages of mostly local information for the West Berkshire cyclist.

With the proliferation of mobile phones with cameras and digital cameras, why not include a photo when you write to us.

Thanks, and with out further ado, our chairman...

### **Chairman's report: Spokes need its members** by Ed Cooper

As a voluntary membership based organisation West Berkshire Spokes needs members to give us the credibility and mandate to lobby West Berkshire Council for improvements to cycling facilities. We are making a difference now to West Berkshire Councils approach to cycling. Our Highways Officer, Kevin Bushell, comments on many planning applications and has ensured that schemes are improved for cyclists. At present we are drafting the cycling strategy for West Berkshire Council's Local Transport Plan and are proposing a system of strategic routes for the District.

Please make the effort to renew your membership, make the effort and do not let it lapse. SPOKES members presumably join because they want to promote cycling and sustainable transport and they want cycling across West Berkshire to be improved. These reasons for being a member continue to be valid so stay involved. Let us know if there is more or other things you would like your committee to be doing.

### **Monthly Meetings**

As from August our regularly monthly meetings will be held on the last Wednesday of the month.

We meet in the front room of the Hog's Head normally from 7pm.

### **Parkway Proposals**

I am sure you will have seen or heard about the Parkway proposal. The proposal is still just that, so your say could influence what provisions for cyclists are provided. Do the proposed residential properties attract you? If so, will there be somewhere to secure your bicycle? Will the proposals make you more or less likely to cycle in the Parkway area? The more individual cyclists respond to the proposal the greater the cycling provisions.

You can have your say at:  
<http://www.parkwaynewbury.co.uk/form.html>  
or by contacting the West Berkshire Council directly



### **Bike Week** **Annual Cycle Count**

June 16<sup>th</sup> saw the fourth annual cycle count in Newbury. The cycle count start and finished one half hour earlier and there was an indication of a 10% rise in cycle usage!

On the Friday Councillors and Council Officers took to their bicycles with Spokes to be shown the problems a cyclist faces in the Newbury area. This was a successful event culminating in a social gathering at the Queen's Head in Newbury town centre.

### **Our Logo**

What is your opinion of our logo (a copy of which appears at the top of this newsletter)? Does it say your local active cycling campaigning group or something else? Please write or email and have your say... your letter might be....

### **Golden Bell - Chocolate Chain**

We'd like your nominations for the best and worst things which have happened for cycling in the district this year. In the next newsletter we'll publish those nominations and ask you to vote on them. At the year's end we'll announce the winner, and loser, and present awards to those responsible. Some examples of cycling happenings over the past year are:

- the Market Place consultation (which clandestinely sought to introduce a town centre cycling ban),

- Cold Ash Chicanery,
- Benham Hill carriageway lane layout,
- St John's annular cycle lanes,
- Newtown Rd (north) cycle lanes,
- New Rd bridleway in Greenham,
- WBC's "Fear of cycling" courses,
- Railway "foot" bridge at Kennet Heath, Thatcham (bridleway 18).
- Lambourn river bridge at Walton Way, Shaw.

Please email spokes secretary, write or even phone (contact details can be found at the end of the newsletter).

### Newsletter of the Quarter

Each quarter there will be a prize for the "best" letter. You need not be a member of Spokes to write (or email). The letter must be connected to cycling in the West Berkshire area.

Examples of "madness" in previous years:



**Kiln Road shared used path – the junction at Walton Road is a nightmare for cyclists.**



**Cyclist Dismount signs around the town – why?**

And there are, of course, many others. You may wish to nominate some happenings in both categories, or just your pet hates, conversely you may only have examples of good practice to nominate.

Nominations by 21<sup>st</sup> October 2005 please.

Here is this quarter's winner from a new local resident, Leeanne Collins:

I have recently moved from Oxford (the city of gleaming spires and many, many bicycles of all descriptions!) to Newbury. I thought it may be interesting to share a couple of my observations regarding cycling and cycling facilities in each of these places with you, whilst the comparison is still fresh in my mind.

One of the first things I noticed having acquainted myself with the railway station was the very limited amount of facilities for cycle parking. Perhaps Oxford is exceptional but there are rows of racks (albeit all weather) where commuters can leave cycles. Whilst Newbury has a few bike lockers at the end of one platform there do not appear to be any other facilities. I cannot believe that there isn't demand for such a service as the commuting volume must be similar if not greater than Oxford's. I would suggest that more facilities of this type might actually encourage more people to "bike and ride" as they would not have to pay for/organise locker facilities.....

Another thing that I have noticed - and this could be a personal thing - is that although there are plenty of designated cycle routes in and around the town, there are some areas where it is unclear whether cycling is either permitted at all or whether a designated route exists. Victoria Park would be one such example. Fortunately I have someone with local knowledge to consult, but I think this would be much harder to fathom if you hadn't.

On a positive note I have found that there are facilities for locking up your cycle at various points in the town centre which is obviously good as it encourages "pops into town" which either might not have happened (bad for trade), or would have been made by car.

I have also found that the access to the countryside around Newbury is very easy by bike and that the countryside itself is lovely – and whilst not wishing to sound disloyal – more appealing than that immediately outside Oxford!

Overall I do think that Newbury is a bike friendly town, but as with everything, there is room for improvement. I will continue to cycle in and around Newbury keeping my eyes open for positive changes or indeed things that might need to improve. Thank you for letting me share my “new girl about town” views with you all.

[Welcome Leeanne – we look forward to an update and happy cycling in and around Newbury.]

### Your Streets This Quarter From Kevin Bushell (Highways officer)

#### Greenham Rd Toucan

By the time you read this, work on the toucan crossing across Greenham Rd between Nightingales and Westwood Rd should have been completed. When Spokes went to examine the work in progress we found that there were quite a few problems in the making.



Looking North at the Toucan crossing

For background, Spokes originally wrote to WBC to express to them that we felt it was the wrong solution for cyclists, citing that it failed in its fundamental concept to address the problems cyclists might have at this staggered crossroads junction at the summit of a steep hill (see <http://tinyurl.com/a55a4>).

We told WBC that they should concentrate on facilitating improved safety of the carriageway, as indeed the Department of Transport advises where drivers readily exceed the speed limit as they negotiate the hill. WBC disagreed with us, and has proceeded to implement the scheme unchanged despite our comments.

So, what we see on the ground now is a flawed shared-use footway being introduced which forces cyclists into an unnecessary conflict with pedestrians - particularly on the east side of Greenham Rd where the footway is narrow – significantly below the minimum width recommended by government guidance – and punctuated with street furniture including inconveniently placed lamp-posts and signage close to the crossing itself. Meanwhile, motorists enjoy the false perception of liberation in not having to consider that they may encounter cyclists remaining on Greenham Rd (because the Toucan and converted footway offers them no benefit). Spokes is very disappointed.

#### Greenham Rd, Stroud Green

Meanwhile, at the bottom of the hill, a different story... The council consulted us on proposals to prevent motorists driving and parking on Stroud Green by building a dedicated parking facility between the carriageway and the Green. Spokes requested that this facility should be arranged in such a way as to enhance cycling conditions on the carriageway, in the same way as the new cycle lanes do in Newtown Rd north (where it passes a similar parking bay). Whilst we haven't yet seen WBC's final design for the scheme, we are assured that our comments have been taken into account, and the scheme re-designed to reflect them. Watch this space.

#### New Rd Bridleway, Greenham

Why is it that schemes which start out with such good intentions ultimately get spoiled by the details in implementation.

We offered broad support for the proposal to upgrade the bridleway and highlighted that a smooth transition between the bridleway and New Rd carriageway was key to a successful implementation.



Looking North and down the upgraded Bridleway

It gave us no pleasure at all to have to, firstly, write to WBC saying that the developer of an adjacent housing scheme had rebuilt the carriageway to obstruct the entrance to the bridleway (which has not been addressed), nor to hear of the intention to introduce barriers across the mouth of bridleway owing to complaints made to local councillors about inappropriate usage. It's clear to us that the aims of WBC's policy unit are being stifled by implementation problems when schemes finally get through the Highways design process.

### Strategic Routes and NCN4

Spokes has been in discussions with WBC over how best to plan for a large increase in utility and leisure cycling in the district. We believe it's key to develop a strategy which recognises the routes people wish to use, and attempts to address removal to the problems they will encounter when cycling along those routes.



The steep bridge on NCN route 4 near Newbury

The joint plan has now reached the stage that it is likely to be included in the Local Transport Plan currently being developed for 2006-2011. We still have concerns that WBC may not fully appreciate the parameters (for example misunderstanding the difference between a so-called "cycle facility", which could be a poorly provisioned and sub-standard converted footway, and genuine cycling friendly infrastructure which means a streetscape which is conducive to cyclists making progress) but we continue to work with them to address those misconceptions.

Amongst the committee, Spokes had animated discussions over whether to include the portion of NCN4 which runs along the canal towpath between Northbrook St and Hambridge Road. We felt we needed to appraise the route to see whether it could be made to conform to recognised standards of provision. We were surprised at what we found: steep bridge ramps barely capable of being cycled, narrow bridges offering no possibility for passing other cyclists (leave aside pedestrians), a rough surface usable only by mountain bikes or hybrid bikes (which becomes quite muddy during periods of damp weather), a complete absence of lighting for night-time usage, a general lack of width and lack of any personal security aspects. Surprisingly, for a Sustrans national route, it seems to fail to meet almost all Sustrans' own minimum standards for provision.



Minimum width on NCN route 4 near Newbury

With no prospect of it ever being upgraded we took the view that it's better to leave it to Sustrans to look after as a leisure route than have it as a target for the local authority to

tackle whilst it has so many more obvious holes to plug in its highway network.

### Enborne Rd "Safe Routes to School" Scheme

It's come to our attention that there appears to have been a much greater incidence of car crashes and general disregard for the speed limit along the length of Enborne Rd (from Newbury boundary in the west, to its junction with Rockingham Rd and Pound St in the east) in the period following the introduction of road narrowings and central pedestrian refuges 18 months ago in the name of Safe Routes to School. These have included drivers losing control resulting in overturned cars, crashes at many junctions with side roads including Buckingham Rd (close to St Bart's School entrance), Kingsbridge Rd, Enborne Gate and the new housing estate at Inglewood Park.

Meanwhile we continue to note that school children are rightly ignoring the poorly located central pedestrian refuge which attempts to force them to cross the road away from the desire line, and reduces the safety of cyclists using the carriageway by forcing conflict with motorists. When Spokes submitted its objections to the SRtS proposals it noted that the proposals would have no discernable positive benefits, and would considerably reduce the safety of the road. WBC chose to ignore our comments and accompanying design solutions. Unfortunately we have no pleasure in reporting that all our fears are being continually affirmed as being correct. If WBC really cares about provisioning highways through which our children can safely walk and cycle then why does it not listen to its own walking and cycling partner groups' advice?

Spokes' committee urges you to contact your ward councillor, or WBC streetcare ([streetcare@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:streetcare@westberks.gov.uk)), to express your concerns if you have a child attending St Bart's, you or your family uses the Enborne Rd area regularly, or are a resident of Falkland or St John's ward.

### SW1 Residents' Parking Scheme

We have received notice of the intention of WBC to extend the current West Fields residents' parking scheme further south and westwards to incorporate an area including parts of Enborne Rd and streets surrounding Andover Rd and Newtown Rd. Whilst we have concerns that there may be some

displacement of current car parking to streets at the fringe of the scheme, and further concerns about the formalisation of on-street car parking so that it becomes the accepted norm to be able to narrow the carriageway, overall we think this scheme will go some way to curbing inconsiderate parking around road junctions which threatens the safety of cyclists.

### Thatcham Stn Environmental Improvements

We've lost count of the number of revisions and reversals to this scheme since it was first proposed last year. The latest proposals present little improvement over previous plans. Our comments on the latest proposals are on our web site here: <http://tinyurl.com/89rou>. Our repeated attempts to contact and discuss the proposals with the engineer responsible have been met with silence.

### NCN4 Lower Way

We've long criticised the implementation of NCN4 through West Berks, along Lower Way in particular because its construction causes such problems for cyclists (see <http://tinyurl.com/74hw6>). As we all know, it's meant to be a bi-directional cycle-only track, but since it's constructed to look like a footway, it's widely used by pedestrians (Spokes predicted this and made appropriate objections before its construction). During early July a rolling program of road works has been taking place along the length of the track requiring its closure. Just to hammer home that cyclists really are second-class road users contractors helpfully erected signs on the cycle-only path stating "Footpath closed" and ordering pedestrians to cross the road – no advice for cyclists whatsoever. Representations to West Berkshire Council were met with indifference. The senior technician responsible, stated "There would be no benefit from displaying it [a "Cycletrack Closed" sign] beside a sign with the legend Footway closed simply for semantic reasons", thus clearly demonstrating that even WBC's own officers don't understand the difference between their own footway and cycle-track facilities, nor do they appear to care.

### Think On This...

Next time someone erroneously tells you cycling is dangerous/unsafe (when we all know it is not) remind them of this:

Of 3,508 people killed in road accidents in 2003

- 774 were pedestrians,
- 693 were motorcyclists, and only
- 114 were pedal cyclists.

The remainder were all in motor vehicles.  
(from an email by Kevin Bushell)

### CCN News

#### Compulsory Helmets

The BMA has voted at its Annual Representative Meeting (ARM) for a mandatory helmet law in the UK for both adults and children.

In a debate scheduled to last only 5 minutes, in which just two doctors were able to speak for and against, a sizeable majority approved motion from Fife division. There were six motions in favour of compulsion (one from West Berkshire) and five against.

#### Mixed casualty messages in 2004

Last year the number of cyclists seriously and slightly injured on the roads both fell slightly, as did the average severity of the injuries. But fatalities were up 18% to 134. However, cycle mileage went down by approximately 14% which means the likelihood of all kinds of injury rose relative to cycle use.

#### Cycling Prosecutions fall 95%

The numbers of cyclists prosecuted for offences such as reckless riding, cycling on footways and inadequate lighting has fallen

95% in the last 20 years, according to DfT statistics. The Home Office says that some fall may be accounted for by a switch to issuing fixed penalty notices – but there is not evidence for this.

### Membership Details

Families can join SPOKES for only £5 a year; individual subscription is £3; £1 unwaged. Send your name, address, phone number and e-mail address to Graham Hunt, SPOKES Membership Secretary.

**Events.** If you would like any events to be advertised here, please contact the Events Co-ordinator, contact details at the end of the Newsletter.

**Adverts.** Please contact the Editor if you would like to place an advertisement in this newsletter.

**Articles.** If you would like to contribute or have any ideas you would like to suggest please contact the Editor.

## 10% Discount

Show your Spokes Membership card at the following local stores and receive a 10% discount:

**Banjo Cycles**, 109, Bartholomew St, Newbury  
Tel: 01635 43186

**The Cycle Shop**, 55, Cheap St, Newbury  
Tel: 01635 582100

### Contact details for Spokes

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**Next Newsletter: Closing Date for articles is 15<sup>th</sup> September 2005, publishing date 30<sup>th</sup> September**





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