



**Welcome to the first issue of the SPOKES newsletter.**

**West Berkshire Cycling Action Group formally became SPOKES at a meeting on 6 December 2002 at Vodafone's Headquarters in Shaw, Newbury.**

### **SPOKES' first meeting**

Local MP David Rendel became the first paying member of SPOKES. Mr Rendel also agreed to be honorary President. As Vice Chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Cycling Group, the MP is closely involved in development of the national cycling strategy. "I've never been asked to be a President before", said Mr Rendel "but I'm completely in support of your aims."

SPOKES' Chairman Tony Vickers acknowledged support from West Berkshire Council (WBC) and from Reading Cycling Campaign in the months leading up to the Group's formation. Council Transport Strategy officer Philip Frost outlined the challenges faced by the council in negotiating achievable local targets for cycling – needed to obtain increased funding for cyclists' facilities - with central government: "Ironically it is our lack of data on current cycling levels that is the problem. Government doesn't trust our targets when the baseline against which they are set is poorly defined."

The Group's first joint activity with WBC was to carry out the first ever cycle count in the Newbury & Thatcham areas in September, for which it was paid over £300. The volunteer surveyors were given free membership of SPOKES. Reading Cycle Campaign has carried out similar counts for twelve years: these include cyclists from the east of West Berkshire District.

Other officers of SPOKES elected by the meeting were Vice Chair William Pitt, Secretary Patrick Keene, Treasurer Graham Hunt and Newsletter Editor Fiona Perry.

Families can join SPOKES for only £5 a year, individual subscription is £3. You will get a regular newsletter and a discount with The Cycle Shop, further benefits will be advertised in subsequent newsletters. Please fill in the details below and send it to Alan Crow Membership Secretary, 91 Queens Road, Newbury, RG14 7PA with a cheque made payable to West Berkshire SPOKES.

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Address</b>	
<b>Phone</b>	
<b>E-mail</b>	

### **SPOKES mission statement**

To identify the needs and represent the interests of cyclists in West Berkshire at every opportunity;

To achieve, through collaboration with others, better facilities for leisure and utility cyclists in West Berkshire;

To help educate local people – especially the young – in safe, considerate cycling behaviour and the benefits of regular cycling, so that more people will choose to cycle more often.

#### **Our Beliefs**

We believe that cycling is:

- **quick** – in built-up areas, cycling is quicker for most journeys under four miles at peak periods;
- **cheap** – no petrol, parking fees or travel fares needed;
- **healthy** – why buy an exercise bike when you can use a real one?!
- **green** – cycling is non-polluting;
- **fun** – if you believe this, join us!

#### **Our Activities**

We aim to provide the following benefits to our members:

- A quarterly Newsletter on national and local cycling matters;
- A web-site with links to local and national cycling groups;
- Regular leisure rides in West Berkshire, in conjunction with other groups;
- Representation on West Berkshire Partnership's Transport Action Group and liaison with West Berkshire Council highways and planning departments and Area Forums;
- Training in cycling proficiency and awareness for adults and children;
- Local events during National Bike Week;
- An annual cycle count, for the local council, at strategic points throughout the urban areas in the District;
- Discounts at local cycle shops.

#### **Cycling Map Draft**

The first major activity by the group is producing a map of cycle routes in and around Newbury / Thatcham and the surrounding country, as the existing database is pretty unreliable. WBC will assist by adding proposed new cycle routes. If sponsorship is found SPOKES will make a limited number of the first version of the map available for free. The target date for the first issue is April 2003.

# CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

For this first issue of "West Berkshire SPOKES" newsletter, I want to explain how we came to exist and what we must do to achieve our mission.

Martha and I have lived in West Berkshire, off and on, for 23 years. When we were in Curridge we were lucky to live in a quiet cul-de-sac so our young boys could safely enjoy cycling. But biking to school or to Newbury was almost out of the question.

Then we had those terrible years leading up to the building of the bypass, when hopelessly congested roads and a planning blight locally meant a whole generation let their bikes rust in the shed. Andrew Wood briefly formed an Action Group in the late 1980s and Laurie Lockwood occasionally put massed cyclists into our streets to make the point that there are other (often quicker) ways to get around. Meanwhile Newbury Road Club and the CTC served those who bike for fun in various ways.

But there has been no single body that the local council in West Berkshire could talk to about all the different aspects of cycling, in the way that there is a Disabled Access Group or Ramblers or Pedestrians' Associations. The council likes to have a representative user group to discuss issues with, for all the services that it provides.

We'd both been members of Newbury District Council (Martha is still a member of West Berkshire and Newbury Town Councils) so we realised what had to be done. In February 2001 we wrote a letter to the local paper asking people to meet and help us form a Cycling Action Group. About 15 people turned up at the Hogshead pub in Newbury Market Place.

For 15 months we struggled along, not having time to bother with making the Group formal, not having any funds, nor doing much to help the Group grow.

Then last June we got a call from the Council's Transport Strategy Officer, asking us to help him devise a Cycling Strategy, in exchange for his help in applying for a Government grant to get us properly established. Although we failed to get the grant, we negotiated a small fee from the Council for organising the first Cycle Count in the Newbury & Thatcham area in September.

In December we called a Launch meeting and formed West Berkshire SPOKES. This month we opened a bank account.

## So now what do we do?

**Two things are most important: influencing the Council, as Highway Authority; and representing you, the local cyclist.** As much as possible, SPOKES wants to help you represent yourselves! To do that, you need to know how "things" work, as regards decisions on cycling facilities. Here's a quick introduction.

Since 1998, it's been West Berkshire 'Unitary' District Council (WBC) that has taken on what the County

Council used to do in our area: build and maintain roads and other rights-of-way. Although based in Newbury, WBC divides the District into four Areas, both for planning (development control) purposes and (since 2001) for Area Forums, which each have a small budget for minor highway improvements. All meetings of WBC are open to the public and at most meetings you are allowed to speak and ask questions of councillors and their paid 'officers'. Area Forums are especially 'user friendly' for local people: meet four times a year, usually in different village halls or community centres. They are well advertised in local shops and schools.

If you have any little niggles about cycling in your local area, as well as telling us (see the list of contacts at the end of the newsletter) why not ring WBC and tell them? Ask for anything contentious to go on the Area Forum agenda. Streetcare contacted by 01635 519080 or [streetcare@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:streetcare@westberks.gov.uk) is best for urgent matters – but your local councillor should also be able to help fix things for you. The more the Council hears from cyclists, the more it is likely to take cycling seriously.

Don't forget your Town or Parish council: they may not have money or duties to do things, but their influence on WBC is great. And their power to act, especially on off-road cycling issues, is surprising (even to them!).

WBC has a Capital Budget (about £2 million a year) for all highway schemes in the area (excluding the M4 and A34) and plans several years ahead for projects like new bridges and junctions, or pedestrianisation schemes. All these have to get Central Government approval, because most of the money for them comes in grants from the Department for Transport (DfT), not from Council Tax. They must form part of a Local Transport Plan, which includes targets for things like reduction in road accidents and numbers of people cycling or using buses. These days, the money just isn't there for more roads, unless WBC can prove it is doing everything possible to reduce car use.

## That's where SPOKES comes in.

Few WBC councillors or officers bike locally, so they don't have much idea where their precious money can best be spent on things that promote cycling. We are needed to help WBC decide priorities – and details of design – for schemes involving cycling.

There are other sources of funds for cycling – and other local bodies involved in transport. Most important is the Transport Action Group (TAG) of something called West Berkshire Strategic Partnership. This was set up in 2001, on the direction of Government, to ensure that all sectors and agencies are fully involved in local decision-making. WBC has to formally consult representatives of all transport providers, user groups, and other interested parties (notably employers), before the Strategic Partnership signs up to a Community Plan. In doing so, every opportunity is taken to seek in-kind or cash sponsorship for things that DfT can't or won't fund. Such things usually aren't the 'hardware' for cycling, perhaps it will be events or publications or other activities that will encourage more cycling.

SPOKES has a representative on TAG, which meets four times a year. WBC has also said it will convene regular

meetings just about cycling, to help monitor the Cycling Strategy that is part of the Transport Strategy.

WBC itself no longer has a Transport or Highways Committee: all major spending decisions are taken by an Executive or Cabinet of eight councillors, who meet at least once a month to decide on a whole range of issues from education to social services to housing. One of several "Scrutiny Committees" of non-Executive councillors looks at long-term issues to do with transport and the environment generally: it meets about five times a year.

As well as Area Forums, each Area has its Planning Sub-Committee, which considers planning applications once a month. As with the Forums, every WBC councillor in the Area can attend and most have a vote. Nowadays they have to be very careful not to pre-judge any application but that doesn't stop them being able to help SPOKES put the case for better cycling facilities on all major new developments. WBC has promised to send us details of all such proposals, so we can submit written comments to the planners. In particular, we look for opportunities to persuade the developers and WBC to use financial contributions, under legal "Section 106 Agreements", towards off-site improvements to the cycling network near a new development. This is a major source of funding for cycling schemes, independent of DfT.

Elections are being held for all seats on all local councils (WBC, Thatcham, Hungerford and Newbury Towns and over 50 parishes). With new Ward boundaries, it's anyone's guess who will be running WBC after May 1<sup>st</sup>. It also means the boundaries of the four Areas will change, although they'll still broadly be groups for Newbury, Thatcham, Eastern (Reading travel-to-work) and Downlands (mainly recreational cycling).

Now a confession! I'm standing for WBC myself, hoping to replace Martha, who has earned a break from endless meetings. There are probably going to be other SPOKES members on various councils too. We'll give details in the next issue.

Finally (because it can't wait) there's WBC's "**Vision for Newbury Town Centre in 2025**". Every household should have had a glossy brochure with their Council Tax demand. In it, it says: "*New cycling and pedestrian routes, both east-west across the Town Centre and north-south across the Canal*" are part of "*the key to opening up opportunities to enhance the use and appearance of ...*" Newbury. To find out more, you can visit either the web-site [www.westberks.gov.uk](http://www.westberks.gov.uk) or your local library and ask for the full consultation document. SPOKES will be submitting detailed comments by the closing date at end June. We will also send representatives to a meeting on Newbury Town Centre access and movement, probably in mid-June.

If you would like to attend this – or any other meetings – on behalf of SPOKES, I'd really like to hear from you. We must engage actively at every opportunity with those who make decisions on our behalf that affect the future of cycling. We must be 'spokes' in the wheel of our local democracy!

Tony Vickers

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55 Cheap Street, Newbury, RG14 5DH

### About Our Logo

Newbury Weekly News has supported a schools' competition to design our Logo. The winner of the logo is Gabrielle Collie who won a bike and helmet donated by the Cycle Shop. Christopher Palmer and James Snelling came joint 2<sup>nd</sup>, winning helmets also donated by the Cycle Shop.

There is a 10% discount to SPOKES members for all goods bought from the Newbury Cycle Shop.

## Updates on Cycle Ways

**Bartholomew Street South.** A spruced-up street scene has come to the usual southwest approach to Newbury town centre. Funded by contributions from recent 'brown field' housing developments tucked away behind the old street facade, we now have ten shiny silver bike-racks scattered among the bollards preventing cars mount the kerbs. With short term car parking and loading bays lined up between these no-parking areas, the ride through this part of town is now smoother - but limited to a safe 20 mph by road 'cushions' like those throughout West Fields Estate, which the shops here mainly serve.

**Northbrook Street** will need signs telling cyclists how they are going to bypass the planned cycling ban (10am to 6pm) on the northern end of Bartholomew Street and across into Northbrook Street. SPOKES will campaigning for clarity over this area.

**Oddfellows Road** (behind Iceland supermarket) now connects right through to West Mills, but with no way of crossing the river/canal west of the old Water Bridge apart from the Lock Island swing bridge and back-aching Monkey Bridge. Cyclists will be faced with either a walk (adding at least 3 minutes to the cross-town journey) or the congested Market Street - Cheap Street - Bear Lane route to the old A34.

WBC has decided that **Thatcham bridle way no. 13** (south of former MOD depot) is to have the 'at grade' crossing replaced with a bridge, which will be designed for bikes. This links the centre of Thatcham with Greenham Common with a traffic free route all the way, for leisure and commuting (to the G Business Park). Given the dangerous nature of Bury's Bank Road (part of Berkshire Circular Cycle Route!) that's terrific.

# Useful websites

Going forward the newsletter will review a web site, however this issues is just collecting useful cycling web sites;

[www.newburyroadclub.com](http://www.newburyroadclub.com)

[www.readingcyclecampaign.org.uk](http://www.readingcyclecampaign.org.uk)

[www.readingctc.co.uk](http://www.readingctc.co.uk)

[www.newburyrc.co.uk](http://www.newburyrc.co.uk)

[www.westberkshirespokes.org](http://www.westberkshirespokes.org)

SPOKES has its own website, which will be the first one to be reviewed in the next newsletter!

## Diary of events

Monday 28<sup>th</sup> April - SPOKES next committee meeting at Northcroft Leisure Centre at 7pm

Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> June – Cycle census for West Berkshire. This vital census will highlight the number of cyclists in West Berkshire, raise the profile of cyclists and increase the priority of cycling projects. If you would like more details, perhaps to volunteer to help, please contact the Event Coordinator.

**Cycle-IT** has regular cycle rides welcome to everyone. If you are interested in joining any of these rides, please contact Laurie Lockwood, 01635 871182 (3-6pm). These are casual rides along countryside roads. Cycle-IT has no membership fee.

C52	10.00am	Sun 27 Apr	Feed the ducks 28 miles
C53	06.30am	Wed 7 May	Isle of Wight * 73 miles
C54	10.00am	Sun 1 Jun	Social ride BBQ 20 miles
C55	05.00am	Tue 3 Jun	Day in France * 30 miles
C56	08.00am	Sun 22 Jun	Lengthy challenge 100 miles

\*These events require booking 2 months in advance

**Bike week 14<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2003 – events to be confirmed on SPOKES website.**

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

If anyone would like to make a private sale, you are welcome to send in your advert; of no more than 20 words, to the Editor or to the address given at the end of the Newsletter.

If a business would like to place an advert with the SPOKES Newsletter, please contact the Editor.

## SPOKES needs you

SPOKES would like volunteers to help with the liaison between cyclists and WBC. Newbury Road Club will take on Downlands Area liaison (everywhere west of Newbury, or north of M4 and west of B4009); Alan Stuart (CTC) will continue to liaise with WBC Highways (district-wide policy matters) and Thatcham Area (Crookham Common to Basildon included); Slim Smith deals with Eastern Area (east of M4 J12); and William Pitt leads on Newbury Area (with lots of support). If you would like to assist, please contact the Chairman, Tony Vickers.

### STOP PRESS

A new 'toucan' crossing is being built across the **A4 west of Newbury**, as part of the "Safe Routes to School" programme. Toucans are specially designed for dual cyclist/pedestrian use and are controlled by users, with traffic lights and a central island. This one is immediately south of **Robert Sandilands primary school** and east of the junction with Old Bath Road. It is an important link between Speen and Newbury for cyclists.

## Contact details for SPOKES

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General postal address	West Berkshire SPOKES 7 Junction Terrace, Newbury, Berkshire, RG14 5SY

## Future articles

Ideas for future articles are;

Letters

Reviews of cycle routes

Safety news

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

Now we need a crossing of Bury's Bank Road where the bridle way comes out at Crookham Common. We also need to look at the rest of the route, which involves a swing bridge over the canal. Any volunteers to write a SPOKES report with recommendations?