

# Minutes of a Meeting of: West Berkshire Cycle Forum

## held on: 09 January 2018

**Present:** Cllr Stephen Ardagh-Walter - Chair  
Cllr Jeanette Clifford - WBC Executive Member for Transport  
Mark Evans - Canal & River Trust  
Peter Challis - Sustrans  
Josh Kerry - WBC Highways (Capital Projects) Officer  
Elaine Cox - WBC Rights Of Way Officer  
Dr Tony Vickers – West Berkshire SPOKES  
Gordon Oliver – West Berkshire SPOKES  
Angela McMahon – West Berkshire SPOKES  
Clive Tombs – West Berkshire SPOKES (minutes of meeting)

**Apologies:** Adam Lewthwaite

	<u>Action</u>
<p>1. <b>WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS</b></p> <p>Cllr Stephen Ardagh-Walter (SAW) welcomed all to the meeting and thanked Mark Evans from Canal &amp; River Trust and Peter Challis from Sustrans for joining the session.</p>	
<p>2. <b>UPDATE ON NCN 422</b></p> <p>National Cycle Network Route 422: Josh Kerry (JK) advised there is a programme meeting with contractor Volker Highways this Wednesday to discuss construction dates.</p> <p>In addition, Road Safety Audit has been done for Phase 2, prior to consultation in summer 2018.</p>	
<p>3. <b>KENNET &amp; AVON CANAL TOWPATH</b></p> <p>SAW introduced the item, relating to accessibility of the towpath for cycling, and also for buggies and pedestrians. Within West Berkshire, the NCN Route 4 runs along towpath from Marsh Benham, through Newbury (with some signed deviations) as far as Hambridge Road, then from Thatcham Station to Theale.</p> <p>Gordon Oliver (GO) and JK outlined concerns about safety for cyclists using the towpath between Marsh Benham and the A34 bypass bridge, which requires concentration to avoid coming out of the wheel 'rut' and potentially falling in the canal. Worst stretch in their view in this section is from the weir east of Milkhouse Road at Marsh Benham up to and under Bridge 66.</p>	

Discussion ensued. Mark Evans (ME) queried the standard set for NCN4 and other NCN routes when Sustrans did the last significant upgrade some 15 years ago. ME also asked for a general view on whether the towpath was appropriate for cyclists, and forum members responded that yes, it was very useful and well-used not only by leisure cyclists but also by commuter cyclists. ME noted that most instances of bank erosion and 'holes' are due to boat wake. Coir rolls commonly put into the water to mitigate this. Presence of water voles is also an issue.

ME explained that C&RT is now starting to focus more on the towpath, as the charity is now restructuring to emphasise its health & wellbeing credentials and availability of towpath for diverse users is in line with that. C&RT stance is to progress path upgrades wherever possible. ME is interested in receiving the output from the SPOKES/Cycle Forum audit of the stretch from Marsh Benham through to Theale. C&RT framework contractor is Kier.

JK flagged that as well as towpath issues, there are very limited hardstandings for boaters. As a result, boaters' pegs can also add to the deterioration. ME commented that as a mainly rural canal, there are less opportunities for constructing boat hardstandings and focus is on providing more informal mooring points.

Peter Challis (PC) from Sustrans noted that unbound stretches e.g. limestone material - do not hold up as well as bound, resin-bonded surfaces. Unbound can decay significantly within 5 years. Resin-bound can last up to 25 years but is significantly more expensive.

PC noted that Sustrans have recently undertaken a detailed audit of all 15,000 miles of the NCN so also are aware of the issues along NCN4. The original measure was to create NCN routes that could be cycled safely by a 12-year old child.

SAW proposed a collaborative project, building on the local audit. SAW asked PC to consider making available, as a pilot, the Sustrans audit findings for the West Berkshire stretch of NCN4.

Ballpark of £150k for ~200 metres of upgrading towpath with resin-bonded material and addressing bank issues as well, but this may be bumped up depending on access issues to site, contract etc. Need to take a holistic approach and address bank issues, substrate and towpath surface all as one package.

ME confirmed the bank/s where the towpath/s located is, in all but a few instances, C&RT responsibility. Where the towpath is only on one side, C&RT own from the bank line on far side, the waterway itself and the towpath bank to a line at the rear of that bank, which may be demarcated by a hedge or fence.

PC said he would record the Cycle Forum's keen interest in progressively upgrading the West Berks stretch and in using the Sustrans audit. Sustrans will have a clearer picture in summer 2018 of their priorities for upgrading sections of NCN.

	<b><u>Action</u></b>
<p>ME said C&amp;RT are keen to get hold of the Racecourse s.106 money and get on with the related path upgrades.</p> <p>JK advised he had met with Jenny Graham and a bid to rural development funding stream is being considered.</p> <p>GO suggested could also be augmented with crowd funding.</p> <p>SAW asked minimum length that C&amp;RT would consider for upgrading. ME would be happy with starting with 100 metres.</p> <p>Meeting resolved:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) To complete the work on the local audit including Angela's work on the eastern section Woolhampton to Calcot, adding grid refs and creating a KML file from survey by Gordon, Josh and Clive;</li> <li>2) Identify safety-critical points where there is a particular risk of cyclists coming off the towpath due to holes/bank erosion;</li> <li>3) Identify three priority sections where the path surface warrants upgrading; and</li> <li>4) SAW to invite ME / PC to next session to progress further.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Angela, Josh, Gordon, Clive, Steve (by 31 January)</b></p>
<p>4. <b>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</b></p> <p>Wayfinding – held over to the February session.</p> <p>Upgrading of path around western/south-western side of Greenham Common – Neil Taylor (NT) asked if scope for Sustrans to lend its support in lobbying the Commons Commission. PC said Sustrans unable to do this give other commitments. SAW felt that the Commission was not opposed entirely, but had concerns over the surfacing, to be resolved.</p> <p>Racecourse – Dr Tony Vickers (TV) highlighted problem with missing signs on The Racecourse Newbury development (also raised by Caroline Lane at December session). JK had e-mailed Gareth Dowding to enquire about this. CT suggested to SAW to approach Jenny Graham and ask whether the Racecourse Travel Plan co-ordinator, John Lloyd from Mayer Brown, could sort this out.</p> <p>A34 between Bury Down Interchange (West Ilsley turn) and Chilton Interchange (A4185 / Harwell junction), just inside Oxon – NT asked PC and others present scope to lobby for cycle provision parallel to this stretch of A34 where there is no alternative route. PC said he would raise this with Ken of the HarBUG group at Harwell to see if their lobbying has got anywhere. Cllr Jeanette Clifford, GO and CT referenced Highways England reassessment of A34 junctions and DfT Major Road Network scheme, and perhaps developer money.</p>	<p><b>SAW &amp; Jenny Graham</b></p>
<p>5. <b>NEXT MEETING</b></p> <p>SAW to check Mark Evans' availability and confirm to Deborah Vince who will book room. <u>Either</u> 18:00 13 February <u>or</u> 20 February.</p>	<p><b>SAW &amp; Deborah Vince</b></p>