

Meeting Minutes of: West Berkshire Cycle Forum
held on: Tuesday 11 October 2022
(via Teams call)

Chair: Cllr Andy Moore (AM) - Member for Newbury Central

Attendees: Cllr Tony Vickers (TV) – Member for Wash Common
Robert Hill (RH) - Pangbourne & Whitchurch Sustainability (PAWS)
Chris Matthews (CM) - Newbury Road Club
Neil Taylor (NT) - Newbury Road Club
Martin Colston (MC) - Newbury VELO (also Leader of Newbury Town Council)
William Pitt (WP) – West Berkshire SPOKES & Sustrans Ranger
Elaine Cox (EC) – WBC Rights Of Way Officer
Clive Tombs (CT) – WBC Highways Officer (minutes of meeting)

Apologies: Cllr Stephen Ardagh-Walter (SAW) – Member for Thatcham, Colthrop & Crookham
Cheryl Evans (CE) - WBC Senior Road Safety Officer
Alec Gore (AG) – WBC Transport Policy Team Leader

	<u>Action</u>
<p>1. Welcome, Introductions & Apologies</p> <p>AM, standing in as Chair for this session, welcomed everyone to the Cycle Forum. Apologies received prior to the meeting were recorded, as above.</p> <p>2. Notes of previous meeting & matters arising</p> <p>Notes of previous meeting held 31 May 2022 were agreed.</p> <p>AM asked about the Commonwealth Schools event in Northcroft Park on 7 July. Post-meeting note: from social media (WBC Facebook page), it appears the event, run by ‘West Berkshire United’, was attended by around 850 children.</p> <p>Other matters arising were discussed under the relevant items on the current agenda.</p> <p>3. Kennet & Avon Canal – Towpath & related Improvements</p> <p><u>Garston Lock to M4 Motorway Bridge, east of Theale:</u> CT had emailed</p>	

Sustrans on 08 June, following up earlier conversation, asking Sustrans if they could press the landowner Prudential to assist with interim improvements and underlining WBC's aspirations. Looking to Sustrans for any further update.

CT's understanding is that no funding from central Government could be obtained by Sustrans for this section in the previous round due to uncertainty over delivery compared with other sections further west where Sustrans and C&RT have plans more

Discussion ensued. EC confirmed that the public right of way comprises a footpath, with Sustrans having reached agreement with the landowner to secure permission for cyclists to also use it. The landowner has no obligation to upgrade it of their own accord, though they could choose to do so.

Sustrans NCN4 upgrades – WBC had been advised by Sustrans that they would be looking to start works to apply a sealed surface on the section also used by vehicles, from near Hissey's Bridge to Mill Lane (alongside Theale Quarry, also used by Burghfield Public Footpath 15) in week commencing 31 October 2022, with the work expected to take up to 21 days. Sustrans were planning a residents' drop-in session.

EC and CT had met Sustrans' Luke Dawson and Lydia Blake in mid-July on site at Burghfield, to discuss the above works, and also proposed Sustrans work to the section from Dewe Lane through to Burghfield Bridge. With regard the latter section, Sustrans are proposing option of creating a boardwalk, to overcome the severe flooding issues.

Ham Bridge to Bull's Lock, Newbury - proposed upgrade of towpath section: CT provided Canal & River Trust with a letter in response to their request of 15 September, confirming that WBC's contribution of £80k to upgrade this section of towpath remains available, also bolstered by Spokes' previous offer of £2k. Canal & River Trust confirmed that this letter enables them to submit their bid to The Good Exchange for match funding. Outcome awaited.

Mallard Court (West Mills) to the Monkey Bridge, Newbury - EC confirmed intention is still to improve this towpath section which WBC is responsible for, to provide a bound surface. EC said this would be an autumn/winter 2022-23. The most recent discussions she was aware of were on basis of providing a resin-bonded surface course, which may be similar to that on Lock Island.

Town Bridge to Victoria Park – section affected in places by subsidence. EC reminded the Forum the issue is with the sheet piling being undercut by water ingress and sand being displaced. Currently interim measures being put in to shore it up. Ultimately will require a significant amount of funding. WBC PROW (with Structures) will follow up urgently with Canal & River Trust for assistance on remedials.

Results from monitoring of upgrade of Colthrop to Brimpton Road (Midgham Bridge) towpath section: CT advised the second post-implementation survey at Brimpton Road/canal towpath was done over a 12 hour period on Wednesday 7 September. The upgrade had been pressed for by Spokes, and enabled by WBC working with Canal & River Trust, plus a successful match funding bid to The Good Exchange. Headlines from monitoring:

30 Cyclists using towpath 07:00-19:00 (*versus 13 in the Before survey on 13 September 2018, representing a 131% increase*). 70% of cyclists, 21 out of 30, were westbound towards Thatcham and Newbury;

51 Pedestrians using towpath 07:00-19:00 (*versus 16 in the Before survey on 13 September 2018, representing a 219% increase*). Movement of pedestrians fairly balanced, 28 Eastbound towards Woolhampton, 23 Westbound towards Thatcham and Newbury;

Reporting of issues with towpath and closing of path – added to agenda as requested. As stated in last meeting notes, for sections of canal towpath that are responsibility of Canal & River Trust, see <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/contact-us/ways-to-contact-us>

For closing-off of path sections that form part of the Public Rights of Way (PROW) network, WBC's Public Rights of Way Team are reliant on reports of hazards coming in to WBC via www.westberks.gov.uk/reportaproblem or via the WBC Customer Services call centre.

4. Cycle Training and events

CE had sent her apologies and is intending to provide an update under separate cover.

5. LCWIP and major schemes update

CT updated the forum and showed photos:

- **A4 London Road/new Lidl, Newbury**
Scheme completed June 2022 following final utility works and resurfacing. London Road Limited have installed 12no cycle racks beside the store now occupied by Lidl. The small park to west of the culvert between the Tesco and Lidl stores is private land that remains responsibility of London Road Limited;
- **A4 Western Avenue (Phase 1 scheme, Brummell Road to Waitrose roundabout), Newbury/Speen**

Scheme completed August 2022. Some minor snagging, mostly on signing, still being followed up by WBC Network Improvements team with main contractor. Intention remains to explore both a 'Phase 2' extension eastwards towards Winchcombe School - with potential for onward links to Robin Hood Roundabout and north Newbury in line with LCWIP - and also better linking into the network through Goldwell Park, via Old Bath Road.

TV mentioned a cut-through through a patch of woodland between the eastern end of Burchell Road, Speen and the far northern arm of Donnington Square, heading towards Castle Grove at the western end of Shaw Estate. Potential for upgrade of this less-visible path had been being explored with PROW team.

6. Active Travel England and Active Travel Fund schemes

CT updated:

- **Active Travel England (ATE)**

ATE is now on a formal footing, as an Agency of DfT and is enabled to take investment decisions. They are now the purse-holders for cycling and walking monies coming from DfT.

Following a recent assessment process, we were invited to submit a bid for revenue funding, the outcome of which is awaited. It will focus on data capture, and building resilience and capability in the authority to enable development of and consultation on, further schemes. We await the outcome.

A Capital Bidding round is also due shortly and bid being shaped.

WBC is continuing to respond to requests from ATE and we hope that the overall positive engagement to date can continue.

- **Andover Road (Wendan Road to St Johns Post Office), Newbury**

Civils work on scheme completed August 2022, except for removal of the old bus shelter which is reliant on the third-party shelter owner. Intention remains to consult on additional line markings which the Traffic team will progress when resources permit.

- **Station Road, Newbury**

Statutory six-month consultation underway on the proposed permanent implementation of a restriction on motor vehicle movements on the western (former one-way) section of Station Road. Cycle Forum members may wish to consider making representations. **Latest date for submitting comments in respect of Station Road, Newbury is 22 February 2023:** <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/StationRoadETRO>

All

- **Lawrence's Lane, Thatcham**

Statutory six-month consultation underway on the proposed permanent implementation of a restriction on motor vehicle movements on Lawrence's Lane, north-east of Thatcham. Cycle Forum members may wish to consider making representations. **Latest date for submitting comments is 19 January 2023:** <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/article/40568/Lawrence-s-Lane-Thatcham-Cold-Ash-Prohibition-of-Motor-Vehicles-Experimental-Order>

TV commented that his understanding is that there are concerns among some adjoining landowners over access, but he very much hopes that the proposals (or something similar to them) get implemented, given the physical nature of Lawrence's Lane including lack of passing space. TV commented that by not entirely preventing physical access to those who have a genuine need to gain access to adjoining land, this may allay some concerns and from his perspective, the benefits of implementing an appropriate form of closure would seem to outweigh the reasons to keep the lane entirely open for general traffic.

- **Deadman's Lane, Theale**

CT's understanding is that there has been an objection to the proposed closure of Deadman's Lane, understood to be from Theale Green School. WBC Traffic team have indicated this may mean the Quiet Lane here cannot be progressed as planned.

- **Crown Mead, Thatcham**

There are still problems with getting to a scheme that is workable and widely acceptable. The Principal Engineer involved will be revisiting this scheme once the Station Road, Newbury scheme is further advanced. Utilities and risk of displacement of kerbs are examples of significant issues still to be resolved. Currently the design, supervision and construction resources are currently committed elsewhere, especially on Station Road.

- **Stockcross path**

Design of the section (opposite Lord Lyon to A4/B4000/A34 roundabout) by WBC Network Improvements team is well underway and it is hoped to table something at the next Forum meeting.

7. Extension/s to the Eling Way

Relates to potential extensions of the Eling Way multi-user path which currently connects Hermitage with Hampstead Norreys. Potential extensions are southwards from Hermitage towards Newbury and/or

northwards from Hampstead Norreys to Compton and ultimately Upton, following the former DN&S Railway where possible, and linking in with National Cycle Network route 544 from Upton into Didcot, which also connects to Harwell Business Campus. Stakeholders keen to see it as a holistic scheme ultimately linking Newbury with Didcot, and also connecting in to appropriate rights of way so as to allow circular walks, plus cycling and horse rides where permitted.

CT advised:

- Expression of Interest submitted to National Highways (formerly Highways England) on 22 June, given that the Eling Way parallels the A34 corridor. Still awaiting results of assessment (a response was chased for again last week);
- One meeting held with a landowner who is also a Parish Chair, which was very positive;
- Meeting also held with the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty team, who have access to limited funding, and via the AONB team, contact now established with farm cluster representative to discuss the scheme – seeking a meeting with her shortly;
- At Hermitage, intention remains to link in with the new developments to the rear of the new Co-Op, on the south/east side of B4009 and that tallies with discussions with Hermitage Parish Council;
- Project plan has been updated on basis of fact-finding meeting with farm cluster facilitator. Pending internal discussion with senior officers on approach, the meeting with the facilitator and in light of wider uncertainty over funding for access and for farm subsidies, current thinking is to draft letters to existing landowners to gauge:
 - their overall attitude to provision of access;
 - what their specific concerns may be relating to access e.g. risk of trespass, damage to crops, litter, etc;
 - what mitigation measures could be considered to offset their concerns.

This takes account of the approach followed by Rails to Trail in Somerset. Landowner contact details are being updated and a draft being prepared of information pack that could be sent out, depending on the above discussions and any outcome from the Expression of Interest submitted to National Highways;

- May be appropriate further forward to engage a Land Agent over and above the facilitator, who may be able to act as an informed intermediary and may have more visibility of land management funding streams; approach has yielded recent results in Somerset;
- CT has also made two approaches to Oxfordshire County Council but has not had any response from the area officer.

CT

8. AOB

- **Festival of Cycling:**

CM advised Newbury Road Club (NRC) is at early stage of planning a Festival of Cycling, with events taking place in June or July 2025, around NRC's centenary, although there are also earlier records of organised cycling in the Newbury area. Chris looking to start engagement and take on board input from Cycle Forum membership. Initial engagement activity in October/November. NRC are looking to bring together a wider working party at end November 2022.

CM/all

CM said running a Festival offers scope for diverse cycle groups and other interested parties to collaborate, raising awareness, ridership and hopefully better acceptance of cyclists – and leave a positive legacy. Initial ideas of sportive, hill climb are quite club cyclist-focussed but CM acknowledged need to broaden-out appeal by, perhaps, cycling street theatre, cycling films, to attract non-cyclists and those who are less confident on a bike.

Anticipated cost of event, at this early stage, is £30k. Newbury RC feel they could contribute £5k so will be looking to tap into match funding from e.g. Greenham Common Trust, Vodafone.

CM commented that there are up to 450 members spread between NRC, Newbury Velo & Team Kennet who might potential be persuaded to get involved as volunteers. The above figure does not include Spokes membership.

WP highlighted that Spokes had previously worked up some plans for a similar Festival and had engaged with Newbury Velo about this, prior to the pandemic affecting plans.

WP and Spokes would be happy to discuss these earlier draft plans with CM and NRC, on the basis of it being a broader event involving NRC, Spokes, Velo, Team Kennet and other organisations.

CM shared his details in the Teams chat. WP and CM to discuss.

CM /
WP

RH suggested to CM that he should speak to the organisers of the Reading Cycle Festival <https://readingcyclefestival.co.uk/> which had been held on 25 September, including the Kidical Mass concept to encourage young people to participate in cycling.

TV offered to speak with CM offline about getting the Festival of Cycling onto WBC agenda.

CM /
TV

- **PAWS and Pangbourne-Purley investigation:**

RH referred to recent exchanges with WBC Traffic team regarding A329 Shooters Hill in between Pangbourne village/Station and Beale Park. RH said that PAWS had been advised that there were no recent issues with road traffic accidents on Shooters Hill and no case for significant changes. PAWS are intending to make contact with Beale Park.

RH also commented on the stop line at Skew Bridge being on an uphill gradient, and that there is no footway across Skew Bridge.

RH said PAWS are also keen on the idea of extending the existing 20mph zone in Pangbourne, also taking into account the recent addition of a 20mph limit in Whitchurch-on-Thames by Oxfordshire.

CT advised following the landowner meeting, site visits and data collection, a Feasibility Study in respect of the Pangbourne-Purley proposed route has been drafted and is now with senior WBC officers for review/consideration.

- **Ethical Reading – Reading Bike Hub:**

RH advised the Reading Bike Hub opening has been pushed back to end November/December.

TV advocated further consideration of a cycle hub for Newbury town centre, notwithstanding the recent police operation relating to bike thefts. TV commented this could, in his view, be carried forward as a Neighbourhood Development initiative.

- **Direction signing strategy:**

CT intends to circulate the advanced draft a direction signing strategy in the very near future, from which can then spur direction signing works, especially for Western Avenue and on the Thatcham –Newbury corridor, focussing on signing at major junctions/decision-points.

- **Orcas – post-meeting note:** pending the independent Road Safety Audit on the proposals, due to multiple issues with the light segregation the intention is to remove these features. For sections where there are no houses on the same side, WBC may potentially consider ribbed lines (rumble strips) but that is dependent on the findings from the independent auditor.

Next Cycle Forum Meeting:

Tuesday 17 January 2023 at 18:00

- Teams link to follow