

**Meeting Minutes of: West Berkshire Cycle Forum**  
**held on: Tuesday 12 September 2023**  
**(Via Teams call)**

**Chair:** Cllr Martin Colston (MC) – Cycle Champion and Executive Member for Regeneration, Growth and Strategy Development, WBC

**Attendees:** Kevin Hurley (KH) – President, Newbury Velo  
William Pitt (WP) – Chair, West Berkshire SPOKES  
Rob Hill (RH) – Pangbourne & Whitchurch Sustainability (PAWS) and Reading Cycle Campaign (RCC)  
Alban Luffman (AL) – Sustrans, Network Development Manager  
Jenny Graham (JG) – Environment Delivery Manager, WBC  
Cheryl Evans (CE) – Senior Road Safety Officer, WBC  
Elaine Cox (ELC) - Senior Rights of Way Officer, WBC  
Clive Tombs (CT) – Senior Engineer, WBC (notes of meeting)

**Apologies:** Neil Taylor (NT) – Newbury Road Club

	<b><u>Action</u></b>
<p><b>1. Welcome, Introductions &amp; Apologies</b></p> <p>MC thanked everyone for joining this Cycle Forum session and introduced himself as WBC’s new Cycle Champion and Forum Chair. Following a round of introductions, apologies received were then recorded as above, with NT experiencing issues joining online.</p> <p>JG advised the Forum it had reached its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, a major milestone to celebrate. She highlighted the commitment from so many people in establishing and sustaining the Forum and pursuing change proactively and pragmatically.</p> <p>JG commented on West Berkshire Spokes’ efforts to foster community engagement and help boost utility cycling.</p> <p>JG said WBC are pleased to be able to table plans and updates for the Forum’s consideration, building on achievements such as the first stage of the Eling Way, delivered through partnership working. JG acknowledged the clear desire of WBC and many stakeholders to see further extensions of this route.</p> <p>MC echoed this; Cycle Forum has a key role in contributing to development of cycling locally, building on WBC plans to deliver</p>	

networks of improved infrastructure over time and as funding allows in line with the adopted LCWIP, and to make cycling safer through training as well as infrastructure.

## 2. Notes of previous meeting & matters arising

Notes of previous meeting held 16 May 2023 were agreed.

Newbury Velo, Newbury Road Club and Spokes yet to meet to discuss Festival of Cycling – discussed under AOB.

## 3. National Cycle Network route 4, towpath & related matters

AL updated: Working through C&RT, Sustrans have channelled funding to restore a dilapidated section of the Kennet & Avon canal towpath, approximately 2.4 km in length, used by NCN4 between [Aldermaston Wharf](#) and [Ufton Lane](#). The works in this section are virtually complete, significantly improving access for walking and wheeling as well as cycling. ***Post-meeting note: further to EC's question, from site visit with Sustrans and C&RT representatives on 15/09/2023, the surface is tar-and-chip.***

**Hambridge Road crossing**: with significant input from WBC and using DfT funding, Sustrans have now completed the feasibility study for a potential future signalled crossing at the canal bridge.

CT reiterated (as also stated to the Town Council's Canal Corridor Working Group) that this is a very difficult site due to utilities, bridge abutments and other features. Further investigation work will be required, starting with an independent road safety audit of the proposals, intended to be commissioned shortly.

**Ham Bridge to Bull's Lock, east of Newbury**: CT confirmed Canal & River Trust's application for match-funding to The Good Exchange/Greenham Trust (GT) remains live, with a view to upgrading this 250 metre section. Though not used by NCN4, this section of towpath is C&RT are still seeking contributions, to complement the £80k offered by WBC and £2k previously offered by Spokes, via The Good Exchange funding portal, at:

<https://app.thegoodexchange.com/project/19729/canal-river-trust/newbury-towpath-improvements-hambridge-road-to-bulls-lock-kennet-avon-canal>

Discussions are underway regarding a potential wider bid to GT.

**Scouring/undermining of bank – Victoria Park to Northbrook Street, Newbury**: EC confirmed problem with water winnowing away the sand underneath the towpath in this section, which EC confirmed was WBC's responsibility, causing the block-paved path above to subside. Public Rights of Way (PROW) team has the lead on pursuing remedials, working with the Council's Structures team. At

present it is reactive work – placing protective barriers. A diving survey has been done. PROW team has sought assistance from C&RT.

**WBC: Mallard Court (West Mills) to the Monkey Bridge, Newbury:**

EC advised bank works required first but PROW team are aiming to undertake surfacing works this financial year. Likely to be asphalt surface rather than FlexiPave due to curing time on the latter.

WP commented on problems with vegetation encroaching on NCN4, including in section from [west of Brimpton Road Bridge](#) through to Aldershot Water Bridge, that was upgraded by WBC working with C&RT and with input from Spokes, in 2020-21. In this section, edgings were not permitted to be used, on the basis that water voles might possibly maybe be in the area, even though the construction impact would have been minimal.

WP also flagged the issue of maintenance of vegetation moving forwards, taking account of reductions to C&RT's maintenance budget and recent similar changes including removal of several dog waste bins. Discussion ensued regarding scope to bolster existing volunteer efforts.

CT suggested that willing volunteers could join Sustrans as Rangers, which would increase the pool of Rangers able to undertake vegetation cutting on NCN4 and wider. This would also enable their activities to be covered under Risk assessments prepared by the Rangers using Sustrans' standard forms. CT, WP and three others are already volunteer Rangers in West Berkshire and have an established WhatsApp group. Spokes have made a recent approach to Sustrans Volunteer Co-ordinator and response pending.

CT willing to put volunteers in touch with Sustrans; CT / AL to liaise.

CT /  
AL

#### **4. Cycle Training and events**

CE updated the Forum:

- Road Safety team looks after cycle training in schools via the [Bikeability scheme in West Berkshire](#)
- Bikeability training delivered to 86% of secondary schools
- Cycle Training resumes this month
- Over the summer approximately 8 Family Cycling courses were delivered, although with people again going overseas for holidays the level of engagement was lower than immediately post-pandemic
- [Bikeability Trust](#) has moved towards ensuring that 80% of Year 6 students receive Bikeability Training before they move on

- Bikeability Balance, Level 1 and Fix have been put on hold due to funding limit being reached. Trust have indicated they will honour funding of courses already undertaken
- Bikeability instructors are all self-employed. CE aware that cost associated with requalifying can be seen as a barrier. Further, Bikeability Trust is keen to go digital, but many instructors not set up for this
- CE said Mel at Velo is aware of some of the overheads associated with Bikeability (when compared with British Cycling-organised training, for example)
- CE glad of the previous offer from KH at Velo to assist, and from WP at Spokes likewise. CE is keen for WBC to work even more closely with our local cycling groups to retain people's interest in cycling beyond the initial Bikeability phase
- Training for adults remain reliant on additional funding becoming available or funding priorities being adjusted
- CE commented could possibly seek to review/adjust priorities further into Financial Year, also having regard to training of secondary school students
- Active Travel Showcase event for schools being held 11th October, schools already invited. WBC will outline what we are involved in delivering, as funding allows, and to take on board schools' priorities and views. MC is interested in attending
- CE circulated photos showing some of the cycle parking installed at primary schools by WBC
- 85% of schools involved with Bikeability in 2022-23 – Cheryl hoping to extend to 94% in 2023-24.
- NT asked about travel to school post-training and identified barriers to cycling. CE referred to an Insight study that has been undertaken identifying these barriers, however research is ongoing. Cycle training is only 1 element to encourage cycling – needs to be part of wider package involving infrastructure and safety measures.
- CE noted that presently only 10% of any allocation from the Bikeability Trust can be spent on Bikeability Fix – team is continuing to compile evidence that it inspires children to take up Bikeability Level 1.
- NT said Newbury Road Club might also possibly be interested in assisting with Bikeability – NT to take up with NRC Chair and if appropriate then contact CE.

## 5. Active Travel England and scheme updates

CT confirmed WBC continues to engage positively with Active Travel England (ATE), the executive agency set up by Government in 2022 to boost cycling and walking levels across England. WBC is using capital and revenue funding secured from ATE to deliver initiatives, most recently having secured £275k from the ATF4 funding stream.

### ***Schemes for construction***

**Stockcross Linkway Stage 1:** CT advised works due to start on 18/09/23, to construct Stage 1 of a shared pedestrian- and cycle path, running along the north side of B4000 and connecting Stockcross village to the existing footway at the A4 roundabout. Significant contribution towards this scheme received from ATE via ATF3 funding stream. Plans remain available here, for information: <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/stockcross-to-a4>

**A4 Crown Mead, Thatcham:** WBC's proposals remain with ATE for their comment. Due to constraints and exorbitant utilities cost, scheme currently envisages on-carriageway lanes. Current intent is to carry forward scheme to construction in 2023-24.

**School Street, Francis Baily School, Skillman Drive, Thatcham:** CE confirmed scheme introduced w.e.f. 05/09/23. For further information on School Streets, visit: <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/school-street-schemes> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6gWsrHvNjM>

A ProGen speed indicator device has been installed on the A4 eastbound approaching the crossing near Francis Baily School.

CE updated on the pioneering School Streets Driver Education Programme which has been developed as a bolster to the School Streets scheme initially introduced in Calcot, using money secured by WBC from ATE. Forum members can try it out at <https://schoolstreets.wbcroadsafety.co.uk/>

### ***Schemes in development and the Linkways network***

**Stockcross Linkway Stage 2:** CT advised Feasibility Study underway for section from A4/B4000 roundabout to Speen Lane, using ATF4 funding

**Old Bath Road, Speen/Newbury:** outline design underway for section from A4 Western Avenue to eastern junction of Speen Lane/access to Goldwell Park, intention being to better-connect Western Avenue Stage 1 cycle facilities (which form part of Linkway 7, as discussed at last meeting) to the shared path on the west side of Goldwell Park. This will be subject to revisions to parking and Traffic Regulation Orders

**Western Avenue Stage 2, Newbury:** concept design underway for section from Waitrose roundabout through to Chestnut Crescent estate, mindful of potential for onward connections to east and north

**Robin Hood Active Travel Improvements:** modelling commissioned of impacts of proposals for at-grade crossings of A339 and A4

**Theale-Calcot Connector:** CT advised Feasibility Study underway for potential future replacement of pedestrian bridge west of M4 Junction 12 with a replacement structure suitable for cycling as well as walking

**A4 London Road/Newbury Manor Hotel:** scheme remains contingent on completion of legal discussions for land transfers, coupled with resolution of utility issues

## **6. Donnington Heights and Shaw Valley active travel link**

CT noted that in line with discussions involving planners and Highways Development Control, and as reflected on the Linkways network schematic map discussed at last meeting, the emphasis would be on upgrading the western route from Maple Crescent via [Poplar Place](#), the established Donnington estate (Dene Way and [Northern Avenue](#)) and Bastion Street, to access the Donnington Heights new development. From there, cyclists are able to use internal roads and a subway (equipped with new CCTV and lighting) that passes under the A339 north of the Vodafone roundabout, to reach the Shaw Valley new estate.

The footpath on the east periphery of the Vodafone site is not judged to be an appropriate route, as it is isolated, not lit or overlooked and hemmed in by vegetation. It is a footpath rather than a bridleway or other right of way.

MC agreed that in light of the discussions and when resources allow time to progress, design work should then be based on upgrading of the western route via Donnington estate described above, to eventually form Linkway 6 between North Newbury and the town centre.

## **7. Extension/s to the Eling Way**

This relates to potential extensions of the Eling Way multi-user path which currently connects Hermitage with Hampstead Norreys.

**Proposed Phase 1 extension:** CT confirmed outline design work continuing for a 1km extension within Hermitage village itself. Drainage and resolving landowner concerns are particular issues.

**Wider activity:** WBC wrote to landowners throughout the section from

Hermitage to Newbury along/immediately parallel to the former railway alignment, offering the chance to meet and discuss potential scheme, building on earlier Feasibility work by Sustrans and Spokes. Nil or negative reaction led to exploration, with PROW team, of scope to upgrade/restoration of existing Bridleway and footpaths in the area south of Hermitage, as an Interim measure. However, the Bridleway SHAW/3/1 which becomes CHIE/34/1 is very undulating, with some sensitive sections, and an ongoing landowner issue. Another potential alignment, using an existing PROW has been identified. However, this could only form one part of a potential route south from Hermitage and further landowner engagement would be needed for a roadside section.

Regarding a potential northern extension towards Compton, CT had asked again about scope for a path to run alongside the proposed Hampstead Norreys flood alleviation scheme but is still seeking a response. Favoured alignment identified but would cross multiple landholdings.

## 8. Any Other Business

Draft of Rights of Way Improvement Plan: EC confirmed this Draft is out to consultation at <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/draftrowip> The consultation ends on 23 November 2023.

EC suggested that Forum members may wish to focus on broad action themes at end of the draft ROWIP, to inform any comments that they may have.

All

Pangbourne & Eastern area issues: RH said that in Reading, unfortunately Primark have pulled out of the proposed cycle hub. RH said this was disappointing after the efforts made by Reading BC, Reading Cycle Campaign and partners over 2 years. RCC & RBC have however been working well with Dr Emma Street at Henley Business School, to help work up a Vision for Cycle Hubs – how to measure success etc. RH to forward this to CT for further circulation.

RH /  
CT

Festival of Cycling 2025: MC is going to meet with John Morrell to discuss. To be kept on Cycle Forum agenda for next time. MC to keep WP from Spokes also looped-in, given effort Spokes has previously made to develop an outline for an event.

MC /  
WP

Objective is to evolve a family-friendly event that celebrates cycling, in particular utility cycling

Next Cycle Forum Meeting:

**Wednesday 13 December 2023 at 18:00.** Link to follow separately.