

SPOKES Workshop



Date: 28 October 2023 **Venue:** Newbury Canoe Club

Present: Lauren Anderson, Kevin Bushell, Ed Cooper, Stephen Fretwell, Stan Green, Dave Jennings, Julie Harmer, Phil Harmer, Gordon Oliver, William Pitt, Paul Rumsby & Tony Vickers

Apologies: Rob Borthwick, Mike Butler, Josh Kerry, Clive Tombs & Martha Vickers

Ref	Item	Action
1.	Welcome <ul style="list-style-type: none">William welcomed everyone to the meeting, and everyone introduced themselves.	
2.	Mission Statement <ul style="list-style-type: none">The existing mission statement was noted.	
3.	Other Cycling Groups' Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none">A summary was provided of what other cycling groups were doing:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><u>Newbury Road Club</u><ul style="list-style-type: none">More sports oriented than Spokes, but less sports oriented than they wereSocial rides tend to be faster than Spokes, and starting about 30 miles or so in lengthAlso run more club and training rides as well as time trials and road racesHave specific women only ridesThey don't target beginner cyclistsRun recruitment stall in Newbury, every month or so<u>Newbury Velo</u><ul style="list-style-type: none">Again, more sports oriented, with a focus on racing (cyclocross, time trials, road races, etc)Coaching for adults and childrenAll ability cycling, including tandems for people who can't ride unaided (e.g. blind / partially sighted)Again club rides tend to be longer and faster than Spokes (typically 40-60 miles @ 15 mph)	

Ref	Item	Action
	<u>Reading Cycle Campaign</u>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – More utility focused – Social bike rides – Cycle maintenance workshops – Bike refurbishment – Counts – Cycling festival 	
	<u>Chester Cycling Campaign</u>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – More utility focused – Cycle buddies scheme – Mapping of barriers to cycling (via online map) – Bike tool loan scheme – Family friendly bike route maps – All ability cycling – Various campaigns – Commenting on planning applications – Active Travel Festival 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Clive had looked at other cycling organisations, but was unable to attend to report his findings. ■ Cyclox was suggested as another organisation to look at. 	
4.	Past Successes	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ As a founding member, Tony Vickers summarised the history of Spokes and gave some insights in his capacity as a member of the West Berkshire Council Executive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Spokes was founded to campaign against the proposed closure of the town centre to cyclists. – Its initial focus was on utility cycling. – Other places had done better in terms of creating cycling friendly infrastructure. – The majority of commuting trips were less than 5 miles and could easily be made by bike. 	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Funding for cycling schemes had always been challenging, since it came in fits and starts. – There had been negative public reaction to the A4 cycle route at Speen, since it was lightly used and did not yet connect through. – There were lots of officers within the Highways Department who were keen on cycling, including Jon Winstanley who had led on the cycle audit. – A number of councillors were also keen cyclists, including Martin Colston (Cycling Champion and Chairs the Cycle Forum), Stuart Gourley and Nigel Foot, – Newbury would soon benefit from a new cycling link through the Sterling Estate, but there was a need to work with employers on Hambridge Road to improve access and cycle parking provision. – Tax Increment Financing was being explored as a route to getting funding for better cycling facilities in key employment areas such as Hambridge Road. – There was significant potential to improve provision for cyclists and achieve modal shift without impinging on road space for motor vehicles. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Discussion around past successes highlighted the following Spokes successes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Newbury cycle map – Cycle audit – Responding to consultations – Securing more / better routes and cycle parking – Council officers were better informed about the needs of cyclists – Spokes previously commented on planning applications, but officers were now better at securing appropriate facilities – Towpath campaign, highlighting where maintenance was needed – Input to the design for the upgraded section of towpath from Ham Bridge to Victoria Park, funded by Racecourse contributions – Securing £100k for surfacing improvements on the towpath east of Colthrop – Work on the Ealing Way, including initial feasibility, getting it included in the Local Plan, approaching landowners (Sustrans involvement had been disappointing – good source of advice, but no follow-through) 	

Ref	Item	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Cycle counts – a good source of income and provided seed funding for key projects – Funding to train Bikeability instructors – Bike loans for pupils wanting to cycle to school who could not afford bikes – Cycle maintenance training – Dr Bike (stopped due to challenges around bike parts - also insurance cover only allowed for adjustments not repairs) – Social rides (several Spokes members were trained ride leaders) – Attended Greenfest and other community events 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Within the current year, Spokes had contributed to a towpath improvement scheme east of Ham Bridge and had responded to consultations on cycling schemes, as well as running a programme of social rides. ■ It was noted that there were several major planning applications that Spokes should be commenting on. 	

5. SWOT Analysis

- Attendees were asked to come up with strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for Spokes.

Strengths

- Council Links
 - Good links with the Council / reputation with Council
- Skills
 - Skills of Spokes Members
 - Respected campaigners
 - Passionate committee members with a good range of skills and expertise
 - Expertise in the mechanics of planning
- Money
 - Stable income stream
 - Healthy bank balance to fund projects / seed projects
- A portfolio of successes to parade

Weaknesses

- Communications (internally and externally)

Ref	Item	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Poor communication with Spokes members ■ Poor communication with the wider public ■ Spokes was relatively unknown outside Newbury ■ Poor links to communities in the east of the district ■ The website landing page was the blog, with long-form articles / [Not a clear Message] “What’s the purpose of WBS” 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Spokes does not actively recruit new members – We do not encourage novice / nervous cyclists who are not confident cycling on the road – Lack of diversity within the committee – No independent commentary on new infrastructure / development – We don’t push the Council enough to do better – Focused on Newbury/Thatcham / Poor links to the Eastern part of West Berkshire 	

Opportunities

- Getting more people involved in Spokes
 - There is a large pool of potential cyclists
 - Cycle festival 2025 could help us to engage new cyclists
 - Making use of social media channels (e.g. Nextdoor)
 - Using the rides to promote Spokes and its activities
 - Including all Spokes members in the email about cycle counts [members don’t get many emails at the moment, so good touchpoint]
 - Recruiting new volunteers through the Volunteer Centre and their recruitment event
 - Simply talking to neighbours
 - Improving cycling information on the website
- Getting [more] younger people involved
 - Using climate change as a means to engage young people
 - Reaching young people through schools
 - Engage the Younger generation
- Links with other groups (e.g. HEAT, PAWS, Greenfest).

Ref	Item	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Improving links with the local media – Developing a cycle charter – Securing improvements through major developments – Governmental / local environmental initiatives – Safer cycling initiatives and reduced speed limits 	
	<u>Threats</u>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Finding new members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Volunteers are all grey-haired [need more youngsters] ▪ Dilution of effort amongst competing cycling groups – Available Money <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Loss of funding for cycle count if it becomes automated ▪ CRT has lost much of its funding, so towpath will suffer – Negative press about cyclists’ behaviour – Reasons for not cycling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Poor permeability for cyclists ▪ Public apathy about cycling ▪ Bike theft – Anti-active travel stance by central government, with limited funding 	

6.

Options for the Future

- There was some discussion around the mission statement:
 - In general, it was felt to encompass everything we wanted it to
 - It was suggested that the mission statement should be retained, but possibly have a more defined purpose.
 - Tweaks to the wording of the mission statement were suggested:
 - We should help to make cycling ‘enjoyable’
 - Delete ‘behaviour’
 - Our aim should be to ‘get more people cycling’
 - ‘Give a voice to’ rather than ‘lobby on behalf of’
- There was a brainstorming session to identify what we should continue doing, what we should start doing and what we should stop doing:

Ref	Item	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Things we should continue doing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cycle counts ○ Social bike rides ○ Cycle forum ○ Consultation responses ○ Monthly meetings ○ Provide seed funding for cycling projects ○ Train / support Bikeability instructors ○ Dr Bike (M-check / how to mend a puncture) ○ Campaigning ○ Progress Eling Way – Things we should start doing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Highlight deficiencies in infrastructure provision ○ Comms / publicity (and look to rationalise channels as using WhatsApp, Spond, Facebook, X...) ○ Comment on major planning applications ○ Develop a cycling charter ○ Contribute to the cycling 2025 festival ○ Bicycle tool room (via Community Furniture Project) ○ Semi-regular events for younger / novice cyclists ○ Address demographic issues ○ Vegetation clearing around cycle routes ○ Cycle audit #2 ○ Identify our campaigning priorities going forward – Things we should stop doing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Leave East of district to Reading Cycle Campaign 	

7.

Priorities

1. Comms
2. Address demographic issues
3. Highlight deficiencies / campaign / route clearing

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Focus campaigns on key infrastructure (e.g. towpath, Hermitage to Newbury) 	
	4. Cycle Charter	
	5. Cycling Festival	
8.	Next Steps	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Review output of the workshop with committee and action <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Whilst we did check through items to continue doing during the workshop, it is worth revisiting this with a little more time and effort to ensure they are sufficiently well serviced, before looking at the additional items. Look at the items to start with and go into more detail and how these are to be achieved Communicate the results of the workshop 	
9.	Thanks to all attendees and special thanks to Newbury Canoe Club for use of their club house to host the workshop.	