

Notes of: West Berkshire Cycle Forum
held on: Wednesday 20 December 2023
(Via Teams call)

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

Attendees: Cllr Tony Vickers (TV) – Executive Member for Planning and Community Engagement, WBC
Neil Taylor (NT) – Newbury Road Club
William Pitt (WP) – Chair, West Berkshire SPOKES
Joe Edwards (JE) – Chair, Reading Cycle Campaign
Rob Hill (RH) – Pangbourne & Whitchurch Sustainability [PAWS] and Reading Cycle Campaign [RCC]
Alban Luffman (AL) – Sustrans, Network Development Manager
Elaine Cox (EC) - Senior Rights of Way Officer, WBC
Clive Tombs (CT) – Senior Engineer, WBC (notes of meeting)

Apologies: Cheryl Evans (CE) – Senior Road Safety Officer, WBC

	<u>Action</u>
<p>1. Welcome, Introductions & Apologies</p> <p>MC thanked everyone for joining this Cycle Forum session.</p> <p>Apologies were recorded on behalf of Cheryl Evans, Senior Road Safety Officer at West Berkshire Council.</p> <p>2. Notes of previous meeting & Matters Arising</p> <p>CT had liaised with AL and had put potential volunteers from Spokes in touch with the Volunteer Liaison Officer at Sustrans; the VLO had subsequently provided further information to Spokes on how individuals and small groups might get involved in volunteering on National Cycle Network routes on Sustrans behalf.</p> <p>CT had also liaised with Kevin Hurley at Newbury Velo on 19/09/23 with regard potential volunteering.</p> <p>EC confirmed receipt of a raft of comments on the Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan. The consultation had concluded on 23/11/23 and results were now being reviewed.</p> <p>Cycle Hubs guidance had been circulated prior to meeting.</p>	

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

Aldermaston Wharf to Ufton Lane: AL confirmed works had been completed by Canal & River Trust on behalf of Sustrans and using money obtained from DfT, to upgrade a 2.4km (1.5-mile) section of canal towpath that is used by National Cycle Network route 4 (NCN4) between Aldermaston Wharf and Ufton Lane.

More details are available [on the Sustrans website](#) and also in the [November 2023 WBC Environment Newsletter](#).

Mill Road/Dewe Lane to bridge near Cuning Man pub, Burghfield: with assistance from WBC and using funding from DfT, Sustrans have just started work to remediate a dilapidated 380-metre section of NCN4 that parallels the River Kennet. The work will raise the level of the path to offset previous problems with flooding, and make it more accessible for people using wheelchairs and scooters, as well as cyclists and walkers. This will link in with work recently completed on the section of NCN4 from Mill Road towards Holybrook, parallel to the M4 and sailing club.

JE commented on the deteriorated condition of the towpath in places – muddy sections making it difficult to use parts of route 4.

AL confirmed this is exactly the issue that Sustrans and partners are trying to address, in stages and as funding, resources and other issues (e.g. land ownership) allow. There is a particular future challenge with two sections where animal grazing takes place right down to the canal/river bank east of Ufton Lane.

Hambridge Road crossing: Report and feasibility design produced by Sustrans using DfT funding and with significant input from WBC, for a potential **future** signalled crossing at the canal bridge.

This is a very difficult site due to utilities, bridge abutments and other features. To help move the investigation further, WBC funded a Stage 1 Road Safety Audit of the Sustrans design and study. To go alongside the above issues, the RSA1 identified considerations around vegetation management. Relative level of use is also a consideration, having a significant bearing on whether a signalled crossing is warranted. At present no additional budget has been identified to develop the scheme any further, so it remains aspirational.

TV referred to his idea previously shared with Newbury Town Council of cyclists and pedestrians being able to use the west side footway alongside Hambridge Road to cross the canal, coupled with:

- acquisition of land on the north-west side of the bridge

- construction of a path descending to canal bank-side
- with the route then using a boardwalk or similar structure, which might be underslung, running underneath the road bridge and paralleling the canal on its north side, to rejoin the existing towpath on its north-east side.

MC asked whether this might be considered in future. CT said that there was a long way to go with any scheme so this idea might possibly get looked at if and when resources might be allocated for Outline design of option/s. CT noted however that land acquisition and construction and maintenance of a new section of path and an additional waterside structure could pose significant challenges.

Ham Bridge to Bull's Lock, east of Newbury: This is a very dilapidated section of towpath. Canal & River Trust have noted it is used de facto by cyclists as well as walkers between Thatcham and Newbury, mirroring its status as a Local cycle route within the adopted Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). According to [the appeal page on the Good Exchange website](#), Canal & River Trust have now raised £246,000 out of their target of just over £396,000, with the Council having recently contributed £80,000 and SPOKES contributing £2,000.

Discussion touched on maintenance of the towpath going forwards. EC referenced C&RT having to reduce down to one annual cut of vegetation alongside the towpath. A significant factor may possibly be reported reductions in future funding and national level for C&RT.

Discussed writing to Government on the issue of funding for C&RT – this requires further consideration. MC and CT to discuss further. As agreed at last meeting, CT approached Spokes and Velo to gauge interest of additional volunteers with Sustrans.

EC raised the issue of structures on footpaths and bridleways, including towpath and highlighted that these are the responsibility of landowners, which needs to be borne in mind for any improvement works. AL acknowledged this.

Reimagining the Towpath initiative: CT confirmed WBC had made a speculative approach to Greenham Trust, to explore whether the Trust might be interested in a wider conversation with Canal & River Trust, Sustrans and WBC, to explore whether the canal towpath could be made even more accessible for walking, wheeling and cycling – ideally in its entirety across the District, or covering further substantial sections.

Greenham Trust responded positively to our approach and the four potential partners met on 09/10/23 to discuss proposals for future upgrades, to be progressed in stages subject to funding and

approvals.

The initial focus is proposed for Newbury, with view to drawing in funding to enable bank stabilisation on north side of waterway and other improvements in section between Victoria Park and Northcroft Leisure Centre.

A long way to go – much for the four potential partners to discuss on delivery, and further meeting due in January. Canal & River Trust will lead, ably aided by Sustrans and with input from WBC. CT is keen to also loop-in the Town Council's Canal Corridor Working Group as and when that gets resurrected.

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

Some bank stabilisation work and fencing has already taken place. EC said she would check latest on main scheme with WBC's Alan Coxon and advise.

Post-meeting note: Alan Coxon has advised he is in contact with contractor and aiming for 12/02/2024 as potential start date, However, that is subject to his further discussions with contractor and to all necessary consents being obtained.

4. Active Travel England and scheme updates

Construction Schemes

Stockcross Linkway Stage 1: Stage 1 is between the [A4/B4000 roundabout](#) and [Stockcross village](#). Part-funded using money received from Active Travel England. It will be a shared route for pedestrians and cyclists. Construction began close to the roundabout end on 18 September. Works are well-advanced, with around 900 metres constructed to base course level, and will recommence in January. Project team still awaiting final consent from oil pipeline owner to construct the section closest to the roundabout

Plans remain available: <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/stockcross-to-a4>

JE asked about level of use and monitoring. CT confirmed a 'before construction' count of cyclists and pedestrians had been undertaken, and further counts would take place after completion, coupled with continued liaison with the Parish Council. CT said that the scheme would be able to bring more benefit if and when resources and funding were available to develop and construct Stage 2.

School Street, Francis Baily School, Skillman Drive, Thatcham:

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 School Streets Driver Education Programme has been developed by WBC using funding secured 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: funding received for Feasibility work to assess and design Stage 2 of the Stockcross Linkway which could extend from the [A4/B4000 roundabout](#) across the [Bath Road Bridge](#) over the A34 to connect in to the quiet road called [Speen Lane](#) that leads towards Northcroft Leisure Centre, Goldwell Park and Newbury.

Main issues are:

- land ownership
- effecting safer crossings of A4 and B4000
- best means of separating active travel users from traffic, given also parapet height and need for access to utilities
- a question over what we are able to do at the Speen end of the site, opposite the residential development site – we have had an initial discussion with the developer.

The Feasibility work is approaching completion and WBC hopes to be able to show concept designs at the next meeting.

Old Bath Road, Speen/Newbury: WBC has prepared a Feasibility design for potential future alterations in the section of Old Bath Road between A4 Western Avenue and the [eastern end of Speen Lane/entrance to Goldwell Park](#). The focus is on footway improvements but the proposal also envisages removal of the little-used parking provision, and painting of cycle symbols on carriageway to highlight potential presence of cyclists.

Any scheme here would need consultation on revisions to Traffic Orders, for which there is no resource available at present. This remains a ‘pipeline’ scheme at present.

Western Avenue Stage 2, Newbury: again funded by ATE to Feasibility design stage, covering proposed next section of Linkway 7, from [Waitrose Roundabout](#) to [Chestnut Crescent/Hawthorn Road estate](#) and west side of [Robin Hood Roundabout](#). Objective is, if resources become available to develop scheme to Detailed design and then construction, to link in to the Robin Hood Roundabout scheme, and into proposed Linkway 6 to Winchcombe School, Donnington Heights and Shaw Valley. Two Feasibility designs prepared, again hope to share at next meeting.

Robin Hood Active Travel Improvements: modelling underway to consider potential impacts of proposals for at-grade crossings of A339 and A4. If feasible and if resources became available in future for further scheme development and construction, this scheme could

connect up Linkways 2, 6 and 7, giving more direct, at-grade access for walking, wheeling and cycling between Speen, Shaw and northern estates, Victoria Park, the town centre and destinations to the east.

Theale-Calcot Connector: CT advised Feasibility Study well-advanced for potential future replacement of time-expired pedestrian bridge west of M4 Junction 12, with a replacement structure that would be suitable for cycling as well as walking. Funding only covers Feasibility assessment and design, but will inform further discussions with National Highways and other stakeholders.

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

Additional funding and liaison with ATE: We were asked by Active Travel England at short notice to put forward proposals for spending a small revenue grant of just under £29,000, between January and June 2024. WBC will be using this money to:

- capture data and prepare Feasibility design for Linkway 6 between North Newbury, Donnington Estate, Shaw Estate and the Town Centre, running west of the A339, as discussed at last meeting and in line with the active travel programme;
- introduce a scheme to make primary school students who use push-along scooters more confident in their use – this is being devised and will be delivered by the Road Safety team

Cycle counters: WBC will be piloting radar-based automatic counters at a trial location on the A4 corridor in the New Year.

LINKWAYS network – initial signing of sections: new direction signs for cyclists, showing times to destinations and bearing the LINKWAYS branding for the emerging network of core active travel routes in Newbury and Thatcham, have been introduced on the first part of Linkway 7 along Western Avenue, and in the Cheap Street/Kings Road West area.

Similar signs will be introduced next to existing shared paths in Victoria Park, following previous discussions with Newbury Town Council. WBC is also working on designs for signing Linkway 2 between Newbury and Thatcham.

5. [St John's Roundabout, Newbury](#)

This roundabout forms the junction between the east-south west aligned A343 Andover Road/St Johns Road, north-south Newtown Road and the vehicular exit from and cycle gate into, Derby Road.

There have been some reported incidents involving cyclists at the

roundabout.

CT explained this item is to obtain reasoned comments and observations from Cycle Forum representatives to inform future consideration, although there are no present plans for revisions.

Before 1979 St Johns Roundabout formed the junction of A343 and the main north-south A34, which used St Johns Road and then Newtown Road to head south uphill; the large circumference of the roundabout was originally to encourage HGVs to turn around the roundabout rather than directly right at a crossroads.

The roundabout was adapted in 2004 to incorporate annular cycle lanes on the circulatory, which remain in use.

Subsequently, a parking bay on the north-west side adjacent number 39 Newtown Road was abolished to provide an improved pedestrian crossing point on the north side of the roundabout, and a cycle gate was created at the entrance to Derby Road. A signalled pedestrian crossing was implemented on the south side of the roundabout in Newtown Road approximately 8 years ago, replacing a zebra crossing.

August 2022 saw completion of a scheme to offset a cycle lane constraint on A343 Andover Road, with cyclists being encouraged to join a wide, off-carriageway shared facility, immediately south-west of St Johns Post Office.

Collision history: for the five-year period 01 April 2018 to 31 March 2023 a small cluster of six recorded incidents attended by Police and rated as Slight, and one rated as Serious, in the vicinity of the roundabout. The six Slight incidents involved cyclists i.e. averaging just over 1 recorded collision involving a pedal cyclist a year over a 5-year period. The history for a ten year period shows the same average.

WP said that Spokes had visited site and identified a number of issues, in particular:

- Gravel spots on annular cycle lanes
- Water ponding on north side of roundabout, exacerbated by recent wet weather
- Annular cycle lanes on the roundabout circulatory may be seen as less-direct, although they are set away from the periphery in line with the guidance from when they were installed. Anecdotal evidence of some cyclists ignoring the green-surfaced cycle lanes as these are perceived as less direct, and cycling straight on through the roundabout on the running lanes – which they are entitled to do;
- Faded coloured surfacing on annular cycle lanes
- Faded white line markings including around the roundabout circulatory, exacerbated by motorists 'turning short' and driving

- across these hatched areas
- Narrow cycle lanes on approach to and exits from circulatory – reflecting that the area is still quite constrained

TV favoured repainting line markings in interim, if feasible.

6. 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 within Hermitage: CT advised still awaiting Drainage design prior to submitting Planning Pre-application and prior to further landowner liaison.

Wider activity: proposals papers, identifying preferred routes for future extensions northward (Hampstead Norreys to Compton and allowing for extension towards Upton/Didcot) and southward (Hermitage-Curridge-Long Lane-Shaw-Newbury) are being drafted.

7. Any Other Business

Cycle parking: WBC provided 6 additional, clearly-marked Sheffield stands immediately before re-opening of Newbury football ground in Faraday Road, augmenting 4 existing stands.

WBC is also working with several Parish Councils and organisations to pursue provision of cycle parking, including Frilsham and Cold Ash Parish Councils among others.

Pangbourne & Eastern area issues: RH referenced recent work by PAWS, with WBC input, to pursue options for cycle parking in Reading Road, Pangbourne – aiming for near Costa Coffee but challenge to get response from landowner.

RH also referred to the Feasibility Studies by WBC for a future Pangbourne-Purley Active Travel route, and for potential future footway improvements on the south side of Whitchurch Bridge.

CT confirmed these Feasibility Studies were both complete and had been shared with relevant stakeholders including Ward Members, Parish Councils and PAWS, and Sulham Estate and Reading Borough Council in context of the Purley scheme. At present no resources have been identified for further design work on either. Both remain on WBC's Active Travel Programme as aspirational schemes and the local aspirations have been highlighted to senior officers and ATE.

Festival of Cycling 2025: to be kept on agenda for discussion at next meeting. As a Newbury Velo member, MC had had an initial discussion with John Murrell of Newbury Road Club.

MC and John Murrell to keep William Pitt from Spokes looped-in, as Spokes have previously developed an outline for an event and previously put this forward to Glen and team at Velo.

Hambridge Road business estate/area: TV is keen to see improved active travel and public transport access to/from Hambridge Road and Bone Lane business areas and had shared thoughts with MC and CT on 20/12/23. CT had responded and noted that again this remains an aspirational scheme that is on the Active Travel Programme for a future year, but no resources are currently identified for design.

Next Cycle Forum Meeting:

Wednesday 13 March 2024 at 18:00. Link to follow separately.

**MC /
John
Murrell
/ WP**