

Notes of: West Berkshire Cycle Forum
held on: Wednesday 13 March 2024
(Via Teams call)

Chair: Cllr Martin Colston (MC) – Cycle Champion, WBC

Attendees: Cllr Tony Vickers (TV) – Executive Member for Planning and Community Engagement, WBC
William Pitt (WP) – Chair, West Berkshire SPOKES
Rob Hill (RH) – Pangbourne & Whitchurch Sustainability [PAWS] and Reading Cycle Campaign [RCC]
Cheryl Evans (CE) – Senior Road Safety Officer, WBC
Elaine Cox (EC) - Senior Rights of Way Officer, WBC
Clive Tombs (CT) – Senior Engineer, WBC (notes of meeting)

Apologies: Alban Luffman (AL) – Sustrans

	<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 Alban Luffman of Sustrans.</p> <p>2. Notes of previous meeting & Matters Arising</p> <p>Notes of the last meeting held on 20/12/2023, were agreed.</p> <p>Festival of Cycling 2025: MC had not heard anything further from John Morrell so this to be kept on agenda again for next time. MC conscious to liaise with WP and Spokes who still have a robust outline for a possible event and who remain open to sharing.</p> <p>TV referenced discussion at end of last meeting regarding Hambridge Road business estate/area. TV acknowledged that as recorded in the meeting notes, any improvements to active travel links in this area remain aspirational, with no resources currently identified for design let alone construction of any measures. TV advised though that, from conversation that he had had with them, Banjo Cycles had said they were willing to fund a survey of local businesses to understand barriers to active travel, perhaps after opening of Kings Road Link Road. CT to mention the idea to officer colleagues to gauge whether or not there might be resource to carry forward, and in what timescale.</p> <p>TV commented that a petition may come through ref- access from</p>	CT

Shaw Valley estate via eastern path around Vodafone towards Trinity School and Shaw House. CT reminded all this had been discussed at the Cycle Forum on 12/09/2023, ref- notes of same; the path on the east side of Vodafone is a Public Footpath, therefore any consideration of any potential future changes/conversion to Bridleway would need to be discussed with Public Rights of Way team. Per previous, the developer agreement relating to north Newbury only references improvements on the north-south corridor west of A339.

St John's Roundabout, Newbury: CT had provided WBC Highways Maintenance team with a detailed note, for their consideration.

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

Vegetation management alongside NCN4 on towpath: CT confirmed that WBC had sent a letter on behalf of Cllr Janine Lewis, to Robbie Moore MP, Minister responsible for Waterways at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, on 08/02/2024. This letter highlighted WBC's concerns over the apparent enforced draw-down by Canal and River Trust on vegetation management alongside the K&A towpath given wider grant-related pressures, and requested that DEFRA review the position, given that volunteer activity cannot hope to make up for regular cutting by CRT staff.

To date, CT has not seen copy of response from DEFRA. ***Post-meeting note, 21/03/2024: Cllr Lewis has advised CT that she has received a reply, however this flags only the grant funding provided to Canal and River Trust nationally and indicates that the Government does not have a say in how that funding pot is managed by Canal and River Trust.***

SPOKES had liaised with Sustrans and a small group (most of whom were already both SPOKES members and Sustrans Volunteer Rangers) came together on 02/02/2024 to ride a small section of NCN4 along with Sustrans' then-Volunteer Co-ordinator. Essentially if a volunteer group get-together is planned, to do small-scale vegetation management under Sustrans' umbrella, then this would need Risk Assessments to be prepared by a designated group leader, with volunteers being made familiar with tasks and tools.

There is an active WhatsApp group for registered Sustrans Volunteer Rangers in West Berkshire, with cross-over with a small number of SPOKES members, so small-scale volunteer activities in specific locations on a small number of days a year might be co-ordinated through that route, if one or more existing Rangers has capacity and time to arrange.

Sustrans-led work in Burghfield Parish: [Mill Road/Dewe Lane to bridge near Cunning Man pub, Burghfield](#) - dilapidated 380-metre section of NCN4 that parallels the River Kennet – CT advised Sustrans

contractor has had to leave site due to renewed flooding and associated deterioration of path base. Sustrans' contractor anticipates returning in April 2024. WBC has been facilitating e.g. with Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders.

Ham Bridge to Bull's Lock, east of Newbury: dilapidation of towpath has been made worse by inundation – flooding from River Lambourn has breached the bank. [Canal and River Trust's appeal page on the Good Exchange website](#) remains open, with the Council having previously contributed £80,000 and SPOKES having put up £2,000.

Reimagining the Towpath initiative: CT confirmed Sustrans, Canal and River Trust and WBC had had a further positive meeting with Greenham Trust officers to pursue formal partnership to upgrade the towpath in stages, more widely across the District. This programme, under the banner 'Reimagining the Towpath' is to be led by the third sector organisations – Canal and River Trust for the sections of canal that they own, and Sustrans for the other sections. Intention remains that the Heart of Newbury (broadly from Football Club to Northcroft) should be the initial section to be focussed on. At the start of March, Greenham Trust's Board had authorised an initial payment of £12k to Sustrans, just to get programme set-up underway. Relevant internal WBC parties are looped-in; CT remains keen that the Town Council's Canal Corridor Working Group as and when that gets resurrected.

WBC: Mallard Court (West Mills) to the Monkey Bridge, Newbury: EC advised this had been further delayed due to Planning- and contractor-related issues. EC to follow-up and advise revised date.

EC

4. Bikeability and Cycle Training updates

CE advised big change upcoming; Bikeability Trust has changed the rules on eligibility for funding.

3,378 young people trained at all levels of Bikeability by end March 2024. Next step in Year 5 for Level 1 then on-road training. Challenge to get the schools to take the initiative; notwithstanding this, WBC is getting on and delivering to schools (40 schools engaged, out of 67 primary/junior schools, 59%).

Bikeability Trust has given grant of £119k for 2024-25 but they have decided [Level 2](#) needs to be priority. Thus funding is assigned with only 10% to cover Level 1, 10% to Level 3 and 10% to Bikeability Plus

CE said therefore uncertainty over whether there will be continued uptake on cycling to school.

Scale-up funding identified - but WBC is continuing to struggle for instructors. If we only deliver 50% then we only get 50% of funding in

following year.

Members could perhaps spur schools to engage further. CE to send MC a note outlining what she would like to happen, for MC to consider and discuss within the Administration.

CE
/MC

MC suggested showcasing to other schools what the Calcot Schools and Francis Baily School are already doing under the Bikeability heading, building on where [School Street schemes](#) have been introduced at both. To be discussed at next meeting; CT to add to agenda.

CT

TV asked scope to push back against the changes. CE confirmed she has already taken this up with the Trust and is also providing thoughts to consultants involved.

WP asked is the Level 1 still just two hours of training in core skills? CE confirmed this, with children then being enabled to venture onto quiet streets at Level 2 to build their confidence further; this then can link onwards to supporting stages particularly Bikeability Fix.

WP asked if there is a particular barrier/s facing instructors - more qualifications that they now have to work through? CE confirmed enhanced DBS check, insurance, Service Level Agreement between WBC and each instructor all need to be in place to satisfy Bikeability. The working hours and obligations are challenging in terms of encouraging new instructors to join, just as overheads for WBC e.g. External Quality Assurance have increased over the years. CE remains open to further discussions with SPOKES, Velo, NRC and other cycle clubs if this can bring in more instructor resource; all to consider and discuss with CE as appropriate.

All

EC asked about having a traffic-free facility, to get initial Level 1/2 cycle training happening away from roads. CE commented that the challenge is then with getting children to/from these locations e.g. if, hypothetically, existing Eling Way was to be used then the challenge would be with getting students to either end of the route.

5. Active Travel England and scheme updates

Construction Schemes – current and proposed upcoming

Stockcross Linkway Stage 1, between the [A4/B4000 roundabout](#) and [Stockcross village](#): CT showed photos and confirmed scheme 98% complete, just pending line-marking for which date is awaited from Volker Highways.

A4/Crown Mead, Thatcham: CT showed the current scheme drawing and explained Active Travel England had reversed their position on

22/01/2024, agreeing that the deliverable scheme (including completing the on-carriageway lanes and revising the signalled crossing) should proceed, given desire to go even further if in the future only if very substantial additional funding was to come forwards that might potentially enable full segregation. CT said that stakeholders would be informed shortly, and with the objective of construction in autumn 2024.

A4 London Road/Newbury Manor Hotel: further progress remains contingent on completion of legal discussions for land transfers – still with solicitors – plus utility alterations.

Schemes in development

Theale-Calcot Connector: centring on potential future replacement of [50+ year-old, narrow pedestrian bridge](#) west of M4 Junction 12, with a replacement structure that would be suitable for cycling as well as walking. This is on LCWIP corridor S5 (Theale-Calcot-Reading). Feasibility assessment and designs have been prepared, to inform further discussions in near future with National Highways and other stakeholders. Keeping in touch also with wider Transport colleagues and with Reading BC as this evolves. CT showed one of the feasibility designs on screen.

Stockcross Linkway Stage 2: WBC has carried out Feasibility study and associated designs for 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](#) towards Northcroft Leisure Centre, Goldwell Park and Newbury. CT showed the preferred design on screen. Again, further discussion with National Highways will be required, as they own the bridge; discussions also ongoing with developer of the 'covered reservoirs' site opposite Speen Lane, on accommodating the path within the A4 Highway boundary.

MC asked about deploying cycle counters to assist monitoring. CT confirmed WBC was about to order two automatic counters and supporting infrastructure, to be linked in to an existing platform.

Western Avenue Stage 2 / Linkway 7, Newbury: Feasibility designs prepared, again funded by ATE. CT showed on screen the design for the shared route variant, for proposed next section of Linkway 7 from [Waitrose Roundabout](#) eastwards to [Chestnut Crescent/Hawthorn Road estate](#) and to the west side of [Robin Hood Roundabout](#). Objective is, if in future additional resources become available to develop scheme to Detailed design and then construction, to link in to the separate, proposed Robin Hood Roundabout scheme, and into proposed Linkway 6 to Winchcombe School and north Newbury via Shaw Estate and Donnington Estate.

Other schemes: among other schemes in development are:
Linkway 6 north Newbury new estates to town centre via Donnington Heights Estate and Shaw Estate: Feasibility design underway in-house in line with the section 106 routing.

Old Bath Road, Newbury/Speen – section of Old Bath Road to connect from Linkway 7 on A4 Western Avenue and Speen Estate to [Goldwell Park and the quiet route to Northcroft and town](#). Internal consultation started; CT showed the proposed design on screen. Emphasis more on footway improvements. The move of a new company into the former Microfocus premises may have a bearing on this.

Linkway 5 / Lower Way, Thatcham: at early stage of exploring conversion of south side to shared use throughout, given relative level of use and current inconsistency in provision (currently part-shared, part-segregated and interspersed with bus stops)

Developer-related schemes:

Watermill Bridge, A343 near Wash Water (inside Hampshire/Basingstoke & Deane Borough): CT advised this residential scheme by Bewley Homes had been approved on appeal. Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council has decided to launch a judicial review of the Planning Inspector's decision. If the scheme goes ahead, then under the s106 agreement the developer will undertake to design and construct a 1.8km cycle- and pedestrian route from the development up the Andover Road to the double mini roundabouts at Monks Lane, the intention being this should then link into other measures including towards Newbury College/Tesco via Monks Lane. Likely that WBC officers will review relevant developer proposals, as they materialise, in common with the approach taken on Sandleford Park/Bloor Homes.

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 Drainage design now received and Planning Pre-application submitted, with further landowner liaison upcoming. CT showed the outline design and flagged a potential issue with one landowner in section abutting Yattendon Road. Challenging to progress alongside 'core' LCWIP and Highway-side schemes but WBC Network Management are persevering, and hopeful to still progress in FY 2024-25. PROW are looped-in.

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) have been circulated to senior officers, emphasising need for Project Team and design/development resources to be identified, and beyond that substantial funding sourced for delivery, if the overall Eling Way Newbury to Didcot vision is to be realised. CT showed mapping from one of the proposals papers on screen and reiterated the challenges given that Eling Way is predominantly off-Highway and wider economic considerations.

MC asked for a summary of issues for his consideration – to understand what needs to happen to potentially carry Eling Way further forward. ***Post-meeting note: CT has provided MC with an analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, for MC's consideration.***

MC

TV noted that a new hedge has been planted along the west side of B4009 between Curridge and Long Lane hamlets, apparently on Highway land. TV reported this has been escalated with the landowner. EC raised the thought of retaining the hedge where safe and appropriate, if the adjoining landowner/s were to agree to permitting future construction of a shared path on a strip of land inside of the hedgeline. ***Post-meeting note: CT has spoke with Jon Winstanley about this and the wider Eling Way scheme. CT will ask Highways colleagues ref- the hedge but general view is that the hedge will have to be ripped out as it impacts visibility and sightlines.***

7. Any Other Business

RoWIP update: EC advised the Rights of Way Improvement Plan has just been reviewed by WBC's Corporate Board; it will then go for consideration by Operations Board, then Executive. It incorporates a Delivery Plan for the next 3 years

Pangbourne & Eastern area issues:

RH asked about the Pangbourne to Purley proposed future active travel route. CT confirmed that the Feasibility Study had been completed; at present no resources were assigned to take this further forward but aim is to progress to Outline design at least for the proposed off-carriageway section between east end of Pangbourne and west end of Purley in FY2024-25.

RH advised Pangbourne and Whitchurch Sustainability (PAWS) continue to liaise with village centre businesses on potential for cycle parking e.g. adjacent Londis store.

PAWS also in discussion with National Trust regarding more

sustainable access to Basildon Park from Pangbourne Station. RH flagged lack of a footway link between [Beale Park](#) and the [Skew Bridge](#) across the railway. RH also asked about Advanced Stop Lines.

CT commented that the number of people wishing to walk the 2 miles from Pangbourne Station to Basildon Park is likely to be very low and queried whether PAWS could instead investigate with local minibus operator Going Forward Buses whether the bus operator might be prepared to bolster their services which drop off and pick up on A329 near to the Station and outside Basildon Park. Going Forward do though rely on income from concessionary travel and in the past reduced their route along A329 due to very low level of use overall.

Beale Park to Basildon Park does not feature on the Active Travel Programme or LCWIP so is not a priority; greater chance of taking Pangbourne to Purley further forward.

RH advised Pankhurst Cycles has closed down in Pangbourne.

RH mentioned Kat Heath in context of [Kidical Mass](#); RH will put her in contact with CE, in connection with the events previously held in Linear Park, Holybrook and the School Streets scheme.

Festival of Cycling 2025: again postponed to next meeting as no Velo or NRC senior reps present.

Next Cycle Forum Meeting:

6:00 pm on Wednesday 19 June 2024, online.

Link to be circulated separately.