

Spokes Hub

April 2024



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Introduction

Welcome to the April edition of Spokes Hub.

It's that time of year when clock's go forward, with opportunities to get out on the bike for an after work ride. Whilst I know many of you cycle through the darker months, it's just that much more pleasant with the sun still up!

For those who have hibernated their bicycle for the winter, then it's time to dust it off, give it an "M" check, and get pedalling. And if of interest, please check out the details of our social cycle rides in this newsletter.

Also in this newsletter are updates on the various cycle related schemes, consultations and just below an update on the regular cycle counts, as many ask about this.

We hope you like the newsletter, please do get in touch if you have any feedback on how we can make it better, if there are any local cycling related issues that you would like us to investigate.

William Pitt
Chair - West Berkshire Spokes

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If you are interested in any of the committee roles, then we would love to hear from you. The roles aren't very arduous and no experience is necessary
Email: info@westberkshirespokes.org.

Cycle Counts

Thank you to everyone who turned out for the recent cycle count in February. This is always a tough gig due to the weather and shorter days!

Everyone who took part was entered into a prize draw for a £50 Banjo voucher and Ed cooper was the lucky winner this time.

Our Cycle Count Coordinator, Rob Borthwick, has done some analysis of the last three years of data. At first glance, this appeared to show lots variation between the various sites and over time. However, considering all of the sites as a whole has highlighted a number of clear trends, including:

- The overall number of cyclists has grown each year, and flows are now 10% higher than two years ago, which is considered to be significant.
- Unsurprisingly, June consistently had the highest number of observed cyclists followed by October, with February having the lowest.
- Male cyclists still significantly outnumber female cyclists.
- Sites near schools have significant numbers of children/young people cycling, which is good to see.
- A couple of sites that have 'high' cycling flows, with most in the mid-range and Hungerford consistently experiencing very low flows.

Discussions are ongoing with the Council's Transport Policy Team about whether the count sites should be revised.

If you can help on at least one morning (7.30-9.30 in February and October, and 7.00-9.00 in June), then we would love to hear from you. Drop us an email at cyclecount@westberkshirespokes.org.

NCN4 Update

Winter Flooding

Due to heavy rainfall over recent months, a number of towpath sections between Newbury and Reading have suffered significant damage from flooding. The sections between Fobney and Southcote Locks and between Ham Bridge and Bulls Lock have been particularly badly affected. Towpath users are advised to follow local signage instructions and to proceed with care. Due to the nature and extent of the damage, repairs will take some time to complete.



Funding

Discussions have been taking place between Greenham Trust, West Berkshire Council, Canal and River Trust and Sustrans about possible funding for towpath upgrades within West Berkshire.

As an initial step, Greenham Trust has allocated £12K to Sustrans for Project Management of the upgrade to the towpath within Newbury for the section between Northcroft and the Football Club at Faraday Road. The proposal would address subsidence issues on the section outside Camp Hopson Furniture Store, which has also been affected by recent flooding. Funding for the works remains outstanding, but initial discussions appear to be heading in a positive direction.

Dewe Lane to The Cunning Man PH

Sustrans was due to complete resurfacing, drainage, and other improvements on a 380 metre section of NCN4 from Dewe Lane to the Cunning Man at Burghfield. Unfortunately, the contractor was forced off-site by the floods, and works are expected to be resume in April.

Burghfield to Mortimer

Shared Footway/Cycleway/Bridleway

A new route between Burghfield Common and Mortimer recently achieved planning permission after some years in gestation by Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council.

The Parish Council had produced a Neighbourhood Development Plan in circa 2015 which [in part] promoted this link between two of the larger settlements in the east of the district.

The principal idea was not only to encourage more sustainable transport options, but also to create a safe and pleasant route for walkers, horse riders and cyclists between the two villages. It will also help secondary school children presently living in Mortimer to easily access The Willink School in Burghfield Common.

Once constructed, the route will be about 1.8km in length. It will largely be funded from CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) money which will be paid to the Parish Council via the developer of a 110 dwelling site in Mortimer, which is now well under construction.

The path will be the standard width [3.0m] and will be fine hogging surface, but not lit. It will go largely through the woodland plateau adjacent the present Burghfield Road (Wokefield Common) on a north/south axis.

It will start in the south at College Piece and end in the north at the south west corner of Burghfield. At the latter point there is a busy road junction where it is anticipated that the local highways authority will be constructing a new zebra / controlled crossing for path users. This is definitely needed to address road safety concerns. The scheme is not yet programmed, so it is unclear when it will be constructed.

It is fortunate that the principal landowner, the Englefield Estate, has sanctioned the use of this land for the path. Another complication that the Parish Council had to overcome was the fact that the land is largely Common so the commoners also had to agree to the path's construction.

Further details of the planning permission can be found on West Berkshire Council's [Planning Portal](#). The planning application reference is 23/01524/FUL..

The planning permission, granted in December 2023, lasts for 3 years, so the Parish have some time to build out the scheme. We will keep you updated on progress.



WBC Cycling Schemes



Stockcross Linkway

Construction is substantially complete for Stage 1 of a link between Stockcross and Speen. This first section consists 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 Active Travel England. Plans can be viewed here:

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

Feasibility and designs have been completed for Stage 2 between the A4/B4000 roundabout and Speen Lane. This will involve widening the footway on the south side to convert it to shared use. There are challenges with the route, including getting cyclists safely from the north side of the B4000 to the south side of the A4. Further discussions with National Highways are required, since they own the bridge over the A34. Funding for the scheme is being sought through Active Travel England.

A4, Newbury Manor Hotel

A scheme has been worked up to widen the existing shared use path past the former Newbury Manor Hotel site. This is a significant pinch point along the A4 corridor. The scheme is contingent on securing a strip of land to allow the fence to be moved back. This is currently with the solicitors to arrange the land transfer. Utility works would also be required.

A4 Crown Mead, Thatcham

Due to space constraints and exorbitant utilities cost, the original scheme cannot be delivered. However, Active Travel England has reversed its position and agreed that a scheme could go ahead with on-carriageway lanes and a single-stage toucan crossing.

This is disappointing, since physical segregation of cyclists and motor vehicles is vital to make people feel safe and confident when cycling, but it appears that this is the best that can be achieved in the circumstances. Construction is expected to take place in the autumn.

Theale to Calcot Connector

Feasibility assessment and designs have been prepared for a potential replacement of the 50 year old pedestrian bridge to the west of M4 Junction 12 with a new structure suitable for cycling as well as walking. The designs will inform further discussions with National Highways.

Wash Water Link

A planning application for a residential development to the south of Newbury has recently been approved on appeal. However, Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council has sought a judicial review of the decision.

If the development is permitted, the Section 106 agreement would require the developer to design and construct a 1.8 km pedestrian/cycle link along the A343 Andover Road past Falkland Primary School and Park House School to Monks Lane.

This would be a key link for commuting journeys into Newbury, including to Newbury College and Tesco, as well as serving the two schools. Additionally, Andover Road is popular with leisure cyclists heading out to Wash Common and Penwood.

Eling Way Extension

Design work is continuing for a 1km extension within Hermitage village. Drainage designs have been received and pre-application advice is being sought from Planning. There is a potential issue with one of the landowners in the section abutting Yattendon Road, but it is hoped that this can be resolved and that the the Council will be able to progress the scheme within the 2024/25 financial year.

Proposals for preferred routes for a northward extension towards Upton/Didcot and a southward extension toward Newbury have been circulated to senior officers, emphasising the need for the project team and design/development resources to be identified, and beyond that for substantial funding to be sourced for delivery, if the overall vision for the Eling Way as a route between Newbury and Didcot is to be realised.

For further details about local cycling scheme, please refer to the minutes of the [West Berkshire Cycle Forum](#).



Hungerford NDP Consultation

The Regulation 14 consultation on the [draft Hungerford Neighbourhood Development Plan](#) has been running from 16 February to 29 March and Spokes has taken the opportunity to comment.

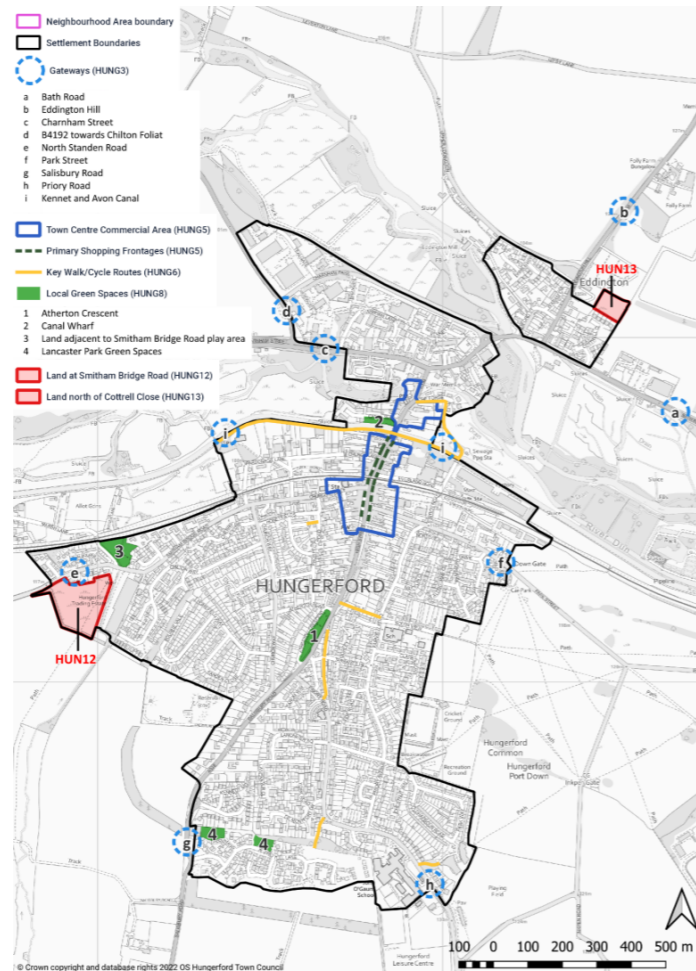
The Plan makes various references to cycling, acknowledging that existing provision is poor, but setting an objective of increasing walking and cycling in the town.

It aims to link new and existing parts of the town into a network of safe walking and cycling routes, and identifies seven routes 'with potential for improvement'.

Unfortunately, while the aspiration to develop walking and cycle routes is to be applauded, most of the proposed links are not really suitable for cycling, due to inadequate width, or alignments / gradients / steps.

Spokes has suggested that these be designated solely as walking routes and that a separate network of cycling routes be identified. Realistically, these would need to be on-road, accompanied by appropriate traffic calming measures.

The NDP includes an aspiration for improving the canal towpath, which would be welcomed, but there are issues with width and headroom in places, as well as potential conflict with other users. Early engagement with the Canal and River Trust, Sustrans and the local angling club would be needed to work out if this would be feasible.



Cargo Bike Trials

You may not be aware, but West Berkshire Council has a small fleet of three electric cargo bikes, which they have been loaning to local businesses for the last two years.

These offer a highly versatile and efficient method of transport for businesses wanting to transport goods and materials to customers living within their local area, and people are often surprised at how much they can carry.

There are numerous advantages associated with using eBikes. Not only are journey times often quicker, but businesses benefit from easy parking and lower carbon emissions too. Also, eBikes are 100% tax deductible, so businesses can write down a purchase under their capital asset allowance. However, buying one or more eBikes can be a bit of a leap into the unknown, so a trial is a great, risk-free way to find out if they are right for your business.

Several local businesses have recently benefited from the scheme including Thatcham Refillables and DeeCaf in Tilehurst. Most recently, a bike has been loaned to a local music teacher, Pedro Santos, who gives lessons at local schools and uses the bike to transport the instruments.

Thatcham Refillables were so impressed with the eBike that they had on loan, they went on to purchase the bike and use it for delivering to local customers, and for collecting stock deliveries and donated bottles.

"Neither of us had been on a bike for 10 years and now we use the cargo bike most days, certainly several times a week. It's totally changed our habits and choices.

"We prefer using it to the car as it is often faster on the bike than taking the car, which surprised us. We even sold one of our cars as we now don't need two cars as we have the bike. The only thing that occasionally stops us is the weather!"



If you or your business would like to hire one, please contact Alec Gore on: Alec.Gore1@westberks.gov.uk.

Social Bike Rides 2024



Spokes runs a programme of social bike rides, which are open to everyone, regardless of whether they are a member or not. Places are limited, so you need to reserve your spot by booking via www.letsride.co.uk.

They run from March to October, and are on the first and third Saturdays of each month. All of the 2024 rides have been uploaded and area available to book.

Each ride is around 30 miles, although the first is 24 miles, and the longest is 32 miles. They are graded from green to black (green being the easiest). A longer ride doesn't always mean harder as the shorter route might have more ascending (in other words hillier).

We ride at a relaxed pace of 10-12 mph and we always wait at the top of the hills for any stragglers.

There is usually a café stop about halfway round (although the Saddleback Farm café closing may cause some adjustment).

They are badged as 'social bike rides', and people are able to converse as we wind ourselves round some lovely lanes and views.

Whilst we do try to make good use of quieter roads, sometimes we do need to go along short sections of more major roads, but it's a small percentage of any ride. And, we occasionally go across Greenham common on the first part (rarely the last part) of a ride.

Our rides are probably not suitable if you haven't ridden for a long while, only cycle short distances or are completely new to cycling. If you are in this group, then we may have a different option for you, or if you are not sure please email events@westberkshirespokes.org, as we would like to hear from you.

We set off at 09.30 promptly from beside Lloyds Bank West Mills, and start gathering about 10-15 minutes before.

We are happy to meet up early if you want to go through more details, or would like us to give your bicycle a check over, particularly if you are experiencing any annoying little maintenance issues.

New Developments

Spokes has noted some significant issues with cycling facilities at recent major developments within Newbury.

The first example is at the Market Street development. We had been delighted that a pedestrian/cycle link through the site had been secured as part of the planning permission, which meant that cyclists could bypass the awkward junctions at either end of Cheap Street when travelling between the station and the town centre. However, the link has not been delivered as per the permission, and cyclists dismount signs have been erected. We can't see any obvious issue that could not be overcome with suitable mitigation.

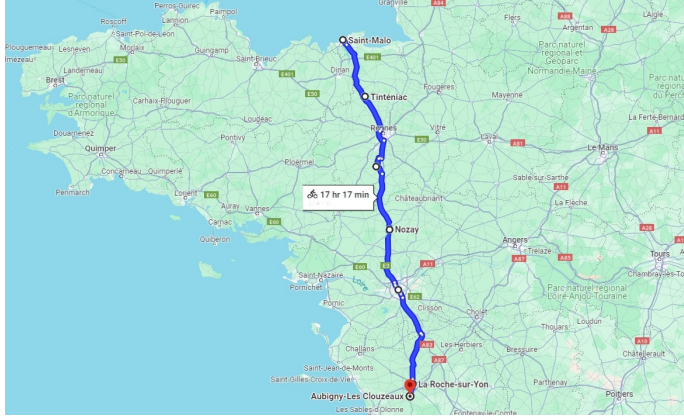


Another issue we've spotted is at the Sterling Gardens development where wall-mounted 'wheel-grabbers' have been installed next to the main entrance. These are intended for visitor use and are directly accessible from the street, so we would argue that the design principles for public cycle parking should be followed. The stands do not allow both wheels and the frame to be secured. They are difficult to use, particularly with heavier bikes, since they have to be flipped onto their back wheels. Also, they are not usable by bikes with full mudguards.



Spokes will be writing to the Council's Planning Department to push for these issues to be addressed.

Spokes on Tour (Part 2)



This is the second, in a series of articles, about the Spokes big adventure cycling down to Spain and covers the section from St Malo to Aubigny-Les Clouzeaux.

Day two – St Malo to Bourg des Comptes – (60 miles, 560m ascent). Having had breakfast on the boat, we packed our panniers, filled the water bottles and made our way to the car deck. We disembark about 09:00, local time and made good use of the cycle lanes to wind our way out of St Malo.

We had a café stop late morning, and then lunched at Tinteniac. There was a handy “Super U” supermarket to buy provisions and a little green park to rest in. About an hour for lunch, before we were off again. We skirt the town of Rennes and met the fourth member of the band – Ed’s brother-in-law from Belgium, Koen.

The meeting spot was where the D434 crosses the Canal de Cice that connects into Rennes. Just a short wait of 20 minutes or so, and all 6’2” of Koen appeared on his “sit up and beg” bicycle with two very large Ortlieb panniers on his rear rack. I had mapped out two route options from here to Bourg des Comptes. One was the canal with 38m of ascent or, the other, along roads with 338m of ascent. The canal route was chosen.

With his fresh legs Koen was put to work as the lead as we cycled to our first campsite of our tour, Camping des Deux Moulins. The pitch was pretty standard size, about 6m by 6m and with a hedge running around three sides. This easily accommodated our tents. We didn’t pre-book any campsites in France, only some of the accommodation in Spain.

Once we had all freshened up, the mind or rather stomach turned to a need for food. We walked up to the centre of the town and to Sebastiano Restaurant Pizzeria, where there’s a very accommodating hostess and a very good variety of pizzas and puds. So, after a yummy meal, it was back to the campsite for lights out and some much needed and well-earned kip.

Day Three – Bourg des Comptes to Nantes – (60miles / 100km, 600m ascent) – an okayish first night’s sleep. Lovely rolling countryside with some lovely, newly, tarmacked surfaces, a café stop en route and then to Nozay for lunch (from the local U supermarket).

As we rolled into Nozay, we were lucky not to have the local workmen chase us who were tarmacking the surface of a bridge. Fortunately, they were having their lunch about 100m away, and shouted “Pourquoi?” as we rode across. Although they couldn’t actually see we avoided the newly laid surface.

After lunch we continued towards Nantes, as it was a warmish day, and this is a holiday not a race, we stopped at Suce-sur-Erdre for a cooling drink, before crossing the Erdre river and on into Nantes.

The night’s campsite was to the east of Nantes, Camping Belle Rivière. We had a good pitch with its own “private” entrance. After setting up camp and showering, the campsite supplied a free aperitif. Next, onto the bikes, and off along a cycle track to the Sainte-Luce-sur-Loire area of Nantes. We eventually managed to secure a table at the Jungle restaurant and had a very filling meal.

Day Four – Nantes to Aubigny-Les Clouzeaux – (70miles / 118km, 550m ascent). We set off along the cycle track towards the centre of Nantes. After only a few miles, the cycle track led us out of the city via a relatively green route. After the morning café stop, we lunched in L’Herbergement, at Le Bistro del la Foire. Then, onward to La Roche sur Yon. Given it was another warm day we stopped for a little refreshment at “Grind”, where the milkshakes were so good, Ed had two!

The intended evening campsite advertised it served more snack food than hearty meals, so we stocked up on food at a nearby U Express and set off for the campsite.

Arriving at “La Venise du Bocage” campsite, the gates were shut, and it was closed. The owner appeared and explained they were getting ready to open the very next day. Koen tried to negotiate to see if we could camp there anyway, but it was a flat “non”, citing “public liability insurance”. So, we had to look at other options. The next campsite (Camping Villedor), seemed permanently closed, and was guarded by a goat.

Back to the phones, and another campsite, Camping Ecolieu, was found nearby... but again another shut gate. The owner appeared and said they were closed, and gave us directions to another campsite he was sure was open.

This time no gate, but no tents in sight either. The owner of the site (Camping Les Sarinieres) popped up, and to our relief they were open. We paid six euros each and off we set to choose where to camp. We chose a spot where we hoped would get some Sun in the morning, so good for drying off any morning dew, but it was almost the furthest point from the amenities.

Tents set up and it was into the pool for a quick soak. It had been a good call to stock up at the U Express.. Campsite hunting had resulted in an additional 10 miles of cycling, so it was a well-deserved sleep that night.

Next time, we make it to the West coast, a local ferry, big dunes and some very long, and very straight cycle paths.