

Spokes Hub

October 2024



Contents

National Cycle Network	2
WBC Cycling Schemes	3
Developer Cycling Schemes	3
Linkway Signage	4
Station Cycle Parking	4
Car-Free in Slovenia	5
Spokes on Tour 2024	6

Spokes Committee

Chair: William Pitt

Chair@westberkshirespokes.org

Vice Chair: Vacant

Secretary: Gordon Oliver

Secretary@westberkshirespokes.org

Membership Secretary: Paul Rumsby

Membership@westberkshirespokes.org

Treasurer: Ed Cooper

Treasurer@westberkshirespokes.org

Count Coordinator: Rob Borthwick

cyclecount@westberkshirespokes.org

Events/Rides Coordinator: William Pitt

events@westberkshirespokes.org

Highways Officer: Vacant

Publicity Officer: Vacant

Website Editor: Josh Kerry

webeditor@westberkshirespokes.org

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.

Introduction

It's that time of year, when the schools are back, the nights are getting longer and the weather is starting to get more precipitous (although admittedly the UK summer, has been a bit of a mixed bag this year.)

However, autumn and winter do not have to be no-cycling periods. It just means a little more planning ahead – such as putting the rain jacket into the pannier or rucksack, or checking and charging those bike lights (once you find them).

It's also a good time to check the bicycle over, e.g. are those tyres a little worn or does the chain need some oil. If you would like a help on how to check your bicycle over, or how to mend a puncture then let us know. We do offer M-check and puncture repair sessions (email me, at events@westberkshirespokes.org if you are interested).

And if you need a little encouragement to cycle on the cooler or less pleasant days, then Spokes will be running our social rides until October. Alternatively, check out Newbury Road Club and Newbury Velo who run rides throughout the year.

Next year is a big year for the Newbury Road Club, they will be marking their 100th anniversary. To celebrate this landmark, they are organising a "Festival of Cycling", which Spokes will be involved with.

This will have something for all cyclists from complete beginners to seasoned pros. This will take a lot of organising, so if you are interested in helping then please let me know.

The date has been confirmed as Saturday, 14 June 2025, so put it in your diary. More details will be provided on the website and in later newsletters.

And talking of newsletters, Gordon has done another great job putting this edition together and has packed in lots of information. And thanks to all for those who contributed. Included is a great summary of many of new cycling facilities in West Berkshire, a write-up on the new cyclist direction signage (have you spotted them yet?) and a couple of articles that are set beyond West Berkshire.

As always, if you would like to know more about anything in , have ideas for articles or would like an article about something (relevant to cycling) then please let us know.

Happy cycling!

William Pitt

Chair - West Berkshire Spokes

National Cycle Network

East of Dewe Lane, Burghfield

Sustrans has completed remediation works on a 380m section of National Cycle Network Route 4 (NCN4) east of Dewe Lane towards the Cuning Man at Burghfield. It now has a high quality sealed surface with drainage improvements that should help to make this section usable throughout the year.



Hambridge Road to Bulls Lock

The Canal & River Trust in partnership with West Berkshire Council is seeking £382,000 to upgrade a 1 km of the towpath to the east of Hambridge Road that was badly damaged by floods earlier this year.

Although NCN4 diverts away from the canal at this point to follow an alternative route through Thatcham, the towpath remains a popular leisure route, despite its poor condition. The aspiration is to create a high quality surface to create a multi-user active travel route between Hambridge Road and Thatcham Station.

A [fundraising page](#) has been set up on the Good Exchange, with Greenham Trust matching third party grants from funding bodies and individual donations. Around half of the required amount has been raised so far, with Spokes contributing £2,000.



NCN4 Whole Corridor Improvements

Although there have been improvements to small sections of NCN4, Spokes remains concerned at the continued deterioration in the condition of the remaining sections of towpath.

There has been extensive loss of fine material from the surface of the crushed aggregate path and encroachment by adjacent grass verges. There are also numerous points where the towpath has become eroded as a result of boats' mooring pegs tearing chunks out of the bank, or dogs scrabbling up and down the banks.

Additionally, in Newbury, there has been significant erosion behind the sheet piling on the heavily used section between Northbrook Street and Victoria Park, which has led to sections of the path subsiding.

In May 2023, Newbury Town Council approved terms of reference for a Canal Corridor Working Group. The Council's adopted strategy for 2024-2028 makes a commitment *'to work with partners to prepare an outline plan for the future development and protection of the Canal Corridor'*.

West Berkshire Council makes a similar commitment in their Council Strategy 2023-2027, which recognises the importance of the canal to local communities and makes a commitment to *'re-establish the Kennet & Avon Canal Partnership (in 2024) to ensure we can effectively maintain and enhance this wonderful asset'*.

Unfortunately, it seems that both groups have yet to meet in 2024, so Spokes is lobbying both councils to make good on their commitments.

The good news is that a 'Re-imagining the Towpath' initiative has been instigated by Sustrans with the Canal and River Trust, West Berkshire Council and Greenham Trust as partners. It is hoped that this can be the catalyst for transforming NCN4 in West Berkshire. A Programme Board has been set up and presentation have been made to a Funders Forum.

Works would require significant capital funding - initial estimates suggest £21M. However, the improvements could be delivered in stages, potentially over a 10-year time-frame.

There would be significant economic benefits as a result of upgrading the towpath. In the UK, Sustrans estimates that leisure and tourism cycling on the National Cycle Network contributes £650m a year to the economy and supports over 15,000 jobs. However, that figure is dwarfed by the bicycle tourism market in France, which is worth an estimated €5.1 billion per year, which demonstrates the value of investing in the network.

Other UK local authorities have made major scheme funding bids for towpath improvements (e.g., [Bath River Line](#)), and we will seek to learn from their experiences.

WBC Cycling Schemes

Stockcross Linkway

Stage 1 of the Linkway between Stockcross village and the A4/B4000 roundabout was officially launched on 9 July.

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.

Discussions are ongoing with National Highways, who own the bridge over the A34. Discussions are also taking place with the developer of the 'covered reservoir site' opposite Speen Lane to integrate the scheme into the proposed new highway layout around the site access.

Old Bath Road, Newbury

Outline design work has progressed. This is mainly a footway improvements scheme, with proposals to reallocate on-street parking bays for cycling and apply cycle symbols on the carriageway. This will connect Linkway 7 on A4 Western Avenue and Speen Estate to Goldwell Park and the quiet route to Northcroft and the town centre. It is hoped to be able to start construction by the end of the 2024-2025 financial year.

A4 Western Avenue Stage 2

Feasibility designs have been completed, using Active Travel England (ATE) funding for Stage 2 of Linkway 7, from Waitrose Roundabout eastwards to Chestnut Crescent/Hawthorn Road and the west side of the Robin Hood Roundabout. Also, a toucan crossing is being considered on the north side of the Waitrose roundabout.

The scheme will be submitted for ATE design review by September 2024.

It is proposed that this scheme would link into the separate proposal for the Robin Hood Roundabout and the proposed Linkway 6 to Winchcombe School and north Newbury via Shaw and Donnington.

A4, Newbury Manor Hotel

A scheme had been worked up to widen the existing shared use path past the former Newbury Manor Hotel site to address a significant pinch point along the A4 corridor.

The scheme was contingent on securing a strip of land to allow the fence to be moved back. A legal agreement had been drawn up and was due to be signed, but the hotel's owners are now considering selling the site.

Feasibility design is now being progressed for an alternative scheme that can be delivered within the constraints of the existing highway boundary.

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 upgrading the existing crossing to a single-stage toucan.

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. Letters have been sent to frontagers and construction is expected to start in late September.

Lower Way, Thatcham

Feasibility work is underway on possible conversion of the footway on the south side to shared use throughout. This is felt to be achievable given the relatively low level of use and current inconsistency in provision (currently part-shared use, part-segregated, interspersed with bus stops that are technically on a cycle track).

Theale to Calcot Connector

A feasibility study has been completed using ATE funding 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 replacement bridge would cost £5.39M excluding land acquisition costs, legal fees and changes to the approach ramps. National Highways do not have the budget to deliver this and are awaiting decisions on their future funding levels. Given that the existing bridge is in a sound structural condition, it is not considered an immediate priority.

Developer Cycling Schemes

Wash Water Link

Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council lost their judicial review of the Planning Inspector's decision relating to the proposed housing development. To the south of Newbury If the scheme goes ahead, then under the S106 agreement, the developer will undertake to design and construct a 1.8km cycle/pedestrian route from the development up Andover Road towards Monks Lane. The intention would be for this to link into other schemes, including to Newbury College/Tesco via Monks Lane.

Sandleford Park / Sandleford West

Council officers have had sight of and have commented on the cycle and pedestrian aspects of the proposals prepared by the developer and their consultants, including how this will link to the existing shared route on Monks Lane.

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

Linkway Signage

The first of a new system of wayfinding signs for cyclists have been installed in Newbury. These show cycling travel times rather than distances to key, local destinations and bear the LINKWAYS branding for the emerging network of core active travel routes.

Signs have been introduced on the first part of Linkway 7 along Western Avenue, and in the Cheap Street/Kings Road West area. Similar signs have been installed next to existing shared paths in Victoria Park, following previous discussions with Newbury Town Council. The Council is also working on designs for signing Linkway 2 between Newbury and Thatcham.

The inclusion of journey times within cycle wayfinding systems is important, since people who are new to cycling often over-estimate how long it takes to make local journeys by bike and so journey times tend to be more meaningful than distances.

Journey times are worked out using a baseline speed of 10 mph, but they can be modified to account for hilly terrain. For trips longer than four or five miles, distances are used, since variations in journey time start to become more significant.

The new signs address a long-standing gripe of ours in relation to the existing wayfinding system that was installed in Newbury town centre a few years ago, which only show walking routes and journey times.



Station Cycle Parking

It appears that there has been a spate of bike thefts at Newbury Station. Thames Valley Police records show that there have been nine bikes stolen from the vicinity of the station in the first six months of 2024.

GWR has been notified of security concerns regarding the design of the two-tier racks in the cycle hub on the south side of the station, and discussions are taking place with the manufacturer to try and find a solution.

Unfortunately, there are also security concerns about the stands that have been installed on the north side of the station, and the Council's Highways Development Control Team are working with the developer of the Weavers Yard scheme to try and find a solution.

The security of cycle parking is of paramount importance, particularly at rail stations where cycles can be left for long periods. When passengers have a bike stolen, they often give up cycling to the station and revert to car travel, which has negative impacts in terms of traffic congestion, air quality and public health.

To reduce the risk of your bike being stolen, we recommend you use two locks to secure both wheels to the frame and stand. Buy the best locks that you can afford, with a Sold Secure Gold/Silver rating. Also register your bike with [Bike Register](#) and get it security marked.



Car-Free in Slovenia

Our Membership Secretary, Paul Rumsby, recently took a trip to Slovenia and was so impressed by what he saw, that he decided to write a short article for the newsletter.

It's always good to learn from what other countries are doing, so we hope you enjoy it. If you would like to find out more about Ljubljana's shift to sustainable transport, you can find out more on the [EBRD Green Cities website](#).

I recently had the opportunity to visit the small country of Slovenia (it takes about 3.5 hours to drive across) as my wife was speaking on a conference on the genetics of nephrolithiasis (kidney stones to us). This left me time to look around the capital, Ljubljana.

It is a small, walkable city, which was the victim of an earthquake in 1895, but this led to its rebuilding with fantastic art nouveau architecture and incredibly wide roads and even wider pavements.

These pavements are used to good effect with pedestrians and cyclists sharing the space separated by metal buttons on the pavement and low-level traffic signals for both. The fact that these paths are also used by Vespa-style delivery scooters can be slightly scary, but the extent of good manners and careful driving is surprising.

This is in a city where traffic is light in the centre, but there are hoards of tourists wandering aimlessly. However, it was not always this way - between 2002 and 2012, Ljubljana experienced a massive increase in car use, while also witnessing a significant decline in the use of cycling and public transport.

To reverse this trend, Ljubljana adopted a new Sustainable Mobility Plan (SUMP) in 2012. This sought to limit personal motor vehicle traffic and give greater priority to pedestrians, cyclists and public transport. A bike hire scheme was introduced, which has seen more than 3 million journeys in its first 4 years or operation. The city has also invested heavily in its cycling infrastructure - it now has a network of 220 km of dedicated cycle routes.

These well-crafted cycle paths also continue into the surrounding villages and from our hotel window, crowds of cycling commuters can be seen going to work. These paths also continue out to the countryside including the Karst limestone scenery and the wonderful Postojna and other caves.

We also had the chance to look further into the countryside, using public transport where possible. This included a bus ride to the tourist hot-spot of Bled costing €2, a slightly chaotic journey lasting 1.5 hours and including the driver's liking for heavy metal music played loudly on the bus radio!

The famous lake at Bled has a shared cycle/walking path around it (watch out for tourists again) and there are smooth long distance cycle paths which seem to link all the main towns.

We went on to Kranjska Gora, a ski town in the Julian Alps on the border, 7 Km from both Austria and Italy. Again there is a great selection of cycle and walking paths and the base for Slovenia's most famous cycle col, Vrsic Pass with 50 hairpin bends. It is no wonder that the smooth (pothole-free) roads and variety of scenery has led to Slovenia fostering some of the World's greatest cyclists and the sight from a bus of a team of mini-Pogacarers with a leader/coach all in identical kit on racing bikes by the side of the road suggests that this world-leadership could be set to continue.



Spokes on Tour 2024

Building on the success of last summer's ride back from Spain through the length of France, this year our intrepid cycle tourers (William, Ed and Kevin) were looking for a fresh challenge.

This year, the Tour de France was due to start in Italy, so they came up with the idea of catching the ferry to France, then taking the bikes on the train to Italy to catch some of the early TdF stages, before cycling back across the Alps over a period of three weeks.

As luck would have it, their grand plan fell at the first hurdle as a result of a land-slip in Italy that had closed a key railway line. Plan B was swiftly put into action - travel by train to the South of France, cycle into the Alps to catch some of the final stages of the Tour de France, and then cycle back to the ferry at Ouistreham (Caen) via Italy, Switzerland and across the Northern half of France. (Did we mention that they were arriving in France on Bastille Day and would be coming back in the middle of the Olympics?!)

William has written a great account of their holiday, which really captures the highs and lows of long-distance cycle touring, including a fallen tree blocking the road, obstructive rail passengers, struggles to find camping sites, and, of course, the usual mix of epic climbs, spectacular views and magnificent descents.

Unfortunately, there's just too much to cram into the newsletter, so instead we have decided to put it all in a PDF and upload it to our [website](#) for you to read at your leisure. However, we have managed to include a few photos to whet your appetite - enjoy the view!

