

WALKING AND CYCLING FORUM

Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 2nd December 2009 at 19:00
in the Crothall Room, St Mary's Church, Ashford

Present: Jonathan Beare (in the Chair), Jonathan Dance (Taking minutes), Christine Green, Colin Cresser, Stephen Bourner, Liz Wedgwood, Gregory Williams, Anna Michalska-Dober, Emily Neighbour (Part-time)

Introductions:

Anna Michalska-Dober attended the Forum as the new Cycling Officer with KHS.

Minutes of meeting held on: Wednesday 9th September 2009 these were approved

Matters Arising:

Future Meetings –Tuesday 02 Feb & Wed 03 March 2010

Membership list

JB had emailed 70 members to update the list and had received circa 40 replies confirming their continued interest.

Publicity

A link to the “Spokes” website had been added to the Central Ashford Community Forum site and a link to the AWCF minutes was now available on the CACF home page.

KCC [Draft] Cycling Strategy:

Liz Wedgwood gave the Forum a detailed update on progress to date. The Draft would go to the local JTB this month (Tues 8th Dec @ ABC Civic Centre). Gregory Williams asked about the possible “shelf life” of the Strategy. After some discussion, it was agreed that it should run in parallel with other key strategic plans in the Borough. Ashford's Future are working to ten year plans (2011, 2021 & 2031). The Local Transport Plan (III) runs until 2016. *It was agreed that Ashford's Cycling Strategy should run from 2010 until 2016* thus allowing one year for introducing and launching the Strategy and a further 5 years to develop and implement it before it is reviewed.

The length and nature public consultation on the Draft Strategy was discussed. The consultation will take place via KCC's www site, town centre and rail station information stands, coverage in the local press and consultation with key stakeholders such as the ACWF and SPOKES.

Following feedback over the last 12 months, the Strategy no longer included the “Walking” element although KCC's Colin Finch (East Kent Area Public Rights of Way Manager) will attend future meetings of the Forum to ensure walker's interests are not compromised by developments in the Cycling Strategy and also to add his expertise on PRoW.

Strategy Launch – see 2010 events below.

Cycle & Footbridge over M20

(See http://www.ashfordbestplaced.co.uk/live_here/transport_and_travel.aspx)

Consultation for this project and the associated works at Drover's roundabout and Junction 9 are proceeding apace. KCC's officers are committed to ensuring the safety of cyclists both during and after the implementation of these works. Forum members are concerned that cyclists (and pedestrians) will have a low priority when it comes to the phasing of the Drover's traffic lights and it could take a very long time to cross *each* of the dual carriageways although in practice it should only be necessary to cross four carriageways as part of any given journey. Once the works are complete, it will not be possible for pedestrians or cyclists to go beyond the proposed entrance to the Warren P&R.

The Forum strongly supports the development of the M20 Cycle and Footbridge with the bridge itself being liked, but would like to see significant safety improvements to the proposals either side. The present three way junction linking the petrol station, Sainsbury's supermarket and the short stretch of roadway which joins Simone Weil Av via the signal controlled junction is very busy and may need to be reconfigured to ensure cyclists' and walkers' safety. Cyclists and pedestrians should have priority over the service road. The landing area for the North side of the bridge is shown as having a spiral access which will be dangerous unless cyclists were to dismount at this point which is far from ideal. Further consideration needs to be given to amending this part of the design to achieve a solution which is closer to that proposed for the landing area on the South side of the Bridge.

The Forum and officers will give detailed consideration to possible routes to link the bridge to the town centre. At present, the safest cycle route would be via Simone Weil and Maidstone Rd but this is almost double the distance compared to a route via the Quantock Estate. However, although shorter, a route through Quantock would *either* have to take in a very long and steep incline *or* would have to pass 2 school entrances which are very congested with traffic during peak periods. A workable compromise may be to consider upgrading the *existing path* which runs from Simone Weil between St Teresa's Primary School and Highworth Grammar School. If this path could directly serve both schools then it would be eligible for Sustrans funding and could therefore be constructed to a high standard. The path could then be extended to link both these schools to the town centre via St Mary's Primary School in Maidstone Road. Alternatively, Officers and Forum Members would support the idea of changing Canterbury Rd to a one way street between the Magazine Rd junction and North Street and integrating a cycle path into the town instead of the current route via Magazine Rd.

Stephen Bourner will feed the ACWF views into the consultation process.

Rail Station Forecourt Improvements

There have been a number of fast moving changes to this project. Funding is now back to its original level of approx. £2 million. The most obvious improvement will be the creation of a much larger pedestrian forecourt in front of the domestic entrance incorporating more cycle parking provision with changes to bus and taxi arrangements and enhancements to the international entrance and booking office. The status of improvements to the cycle underpass (adjacent to the Stour) is unclear at present. The Forum were adamant that this area must be improved as part of the improvements irrespective of issues about ownership. Due to time constraints attached to the funding, consultation will focus on *one* design with

the opportunity to comment on and improve the details. SEEDA have agreed to the inclusion of a “diagonal” pedestrian & cycle route across International House and Dover Place linking the station to the town centre. It is hoped that the works will be completed by the end of 2010.

Willesborough Dykes Cycle Route to Park Farm & Cheeseman’s Green Routes

This project is now unlikely proceed due to insurmountable problems (land ownership, safety of A2070 / A2042 crossing, high cost of essential bridging structures, concerns about cyclists’ safety.). This is a major disappointment as there is no direct cycle or foot path from Park Farm and Kingsnorth to the centre of Ashford. *As an alternative, the Forum strongly supports the provision of a route parallel to the West (town bound) carriageway Romney Marsh Rd* with Toucan crossings at the road junctions ((1)Norman Rd (2) Malcolm Sgt Rd (3) Ashford Rd (set back from the roundabouts for safety)). As part of the Cheeseman’s Green Development there will be a cycle route to link this area to existing routes Note: neither the Officers present nor the Forum Members consider this an alternative to the direct route to Park Farm and Kingsnorth referred to above.

Cycle to Work

ABC / Ashford’s Future have successfully secured funding for a 2 year project to promote cycling to work. This is supported by the East Kent and Coastal PCT (Dept of Health), the Cycling Touring Club of GB (CTC) and other agencies. The funding will cover an officer post (based at Ashford’s Future) and practical development work with the town’s employers and their employees.

2010 Cycling Events

As stated in the previous meeting’s minutes, SB is continuing to examine the possibility of the “Tour Series” organised by “SweetSpot” coming to Ashford on Tuesday 15th June. Community participation in this event would be limited as it is a week day and during term-time.

LW wishes to hold an event in the summer to launch the Cycling Strategy. Possible venues and dates were discussed. The event may best be suited to a relatively open public space with existing cycle provision such as the North Park or Victoria Park.

As the event would aim to attract the broadest possible age range, it should take place *after* the schools have finished their main exams (GCSE AS and A Level) but *before* the summer holiday period (end of July to end of August). LW stated that approximately 6 months planning would be required for this event. LW will check “established” dates in the Ashford calendar such as any music festivals, carnivals fun fairs and so on.

AOB

A footpath which is presently closed will be re-opened allowing better access to the new Waitrose Supermarket at Repton.

End of meeting: 2100hrs

ACWF is grateful to St Mary’s Church for the use of the meeting room.