

# ASHFORD WALKING AND CYCLING FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2010  
in the Crothall Room, St Mary's Church, Ashford

**Present:** Jonathan Beare (in the Chair); Emily Neighbour (taking minutes) Central Ashford Community Forum; Christine Green, CACF and Town Centre Partnership; Spencer Morgan, Cycle Trainer; Liz Wedgwood, Kent County Council Transport Planner; Tracey Ruck, GMB union rep and taxi driver; Colin Cresser, cycling commuter; Ted Prangnell, cycling campaigner; Emma Powell, Ashford Borough Council; Stephen Bournier, Ashford's Future; Adrian Steele, Cyclist.

Thank you to Spencer Morgan for the Bike Health Check session before the meeting.

Thank you to the Colin Preece and the Church of England for the use of the room and we wish them every success in the building improvement works.

**Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> June:** these were approved.

**Ashford Cycling Strategy:** this was finished, with all the comments incorporated as appropriate. It would be considered by the Joint Transportation Board on 14<sup>th</sup> September. Once completed it should be a useful lever for developers to ensure they incorporated sensible cycling routes into new estates.

**Willesborough Dykes Cycle Path from Asda to Park Farm:** GADF and Sustrans funding for this had been withdrawn, so for the time being it would not be going ahead. It was hoped the project could be included in the development of Cheeseman's Green as part of a north-south strategic link.

**Active Cycle Challenge:** Spencer Morgan explained that this had been launched and would be active over the next two years. It was funded by the NHS, ABC and CTC and was designed to encourage cyclists to get back on their bikes by offering various incentives. He asked all present to encourage people they knew to take part – see [www.ashfordcylechallenge.org.uk](http://www.ashfordcylechallenge.org.uk)

**Station Improvements:** the roundabout extension had been approved by the planning committee of ABC but the comments of the CACF representative about inadequate consultation had been taken on board and a meeting was held at Ashford's Future with Jonathan Beare of ACWF, Emily Neighbour (ACWF & CACF), Christine Green (ACWF, CACF & Town Centre Partnership) and Jim Davies (CACF). Stephen Bournier and Linda Doran of Ashford's Future and the two designers of the scheme from Optimum Consulting were present. They had appeared reluctant to take on board the concerns of the Forums. However, to cut a long story short, Ashford's Future had been firmly directed by Ashford Borough Council to rethink the design given the great deal of concerns also expressed by many other users of the station, including the taxi drivers and various disability groups. The recommendation of the Executive Committee had been that Ashford's Future should go back and consult with all the relevant stakeholders before redrawing the plans.

Stephen Bournier reported that there would be an additional meeting hosted by Ashford's Future on Thursday (9 Sep 10) where new proposals would be put forward and a representative of all the relevant organisations had been or would be invited to attend and make comments. Jonathan Beare would represent ACWF, EN and CG would attend for CACF and TCP respectively.

The meeting then discussed the issues with the proposals, including:

- Discussions were being initiated with the new owners of the High Speed 1 line and infrastructure. JB pointed out that if users of both domestic and international services were being expected to use both entrances then the signage should make this clear. SB explained that it is difficult to decide anything because there are so many different companies involved with the station but meetings would be held to try and achieve this.
- Several members of the Forum believed that commuters have not been consulted properly, it appeared that many were unaware of the changes planned. Although there had been public consultation at the station on one day, commuters would generally be rushing to work or home and were likely not to be interested in filling in questionnaires in those circumstances. SB said he would find out if it was possible for the results of that survey to be made public.
- Concern was expressed that there should be two safe crossings for cyclists and pedestrians across Station Road.
- The route to the underpass to Elwick Road should be made safer and easier to use.
- A safe route through the International House car park also needs to be planned, SB explained that SEEDA owned the building but had been abolished by the new government.
- There had been a Disability Impact Statement but SB explained that it was still with the consultant in draft form.
- EN asked that those present indicate what they considered needed improvement at the station as it was, notwithstanding the proposals. She put forward her husband's complaint that the dropped kerb crossing to International House is often blocked by queuing taxis. TR admitted this was true and that no enforcement action was ever taken against them – this should be ABC's responsibility. She explained that there was nowhere else for excess taxis to go, and admitted that there was overprovision of taxis which was part of the problem. An additional taxi rank at the International side might help this and provide a useful service to the international travellers who otherwise have to walk a long way to get a taxi.
- EN also pointed out that the current parking on the forecourt is badly signed as it says Motorcycles only and 20 minutes equally prominently. TR pointed out that many disabled users do not use the disabled spaces there because they do not realise they are long-stay.
- Also, there are complaints that the area in front of the station becomes congested at peak times owing to the number of private cars waiting to meet passengers of trains – currently there is a sign saying buses and taxis only but this is not policed. A simple solution to the congestion would be to move on these cars at peak times but no effort is made to do this.
- It was agreed that now the front of the station building has been extended there is insufficient space for safety between the front doors and the kerb.
- Undercover cycle parking should be freely available – the current shelter is normally empty, but it is impossible to get a pass to use it.
- More cycle parking is needed.
- A route through the upper car park to the underpass is required to use this safe access to town and make it more obvious to the visitor.
- A joined up route through the Civic Centre car park is needed – currently there are gaps by Tannery Lane and at the bottom of East Hill which with relatively minor works could make cycling to the station much more convenient.
- A crossing to Civic Centre by roundabout is essential.
- TR asked why only Stagecoach had been consulted as there were several other bus companies who serviced the station. She had previously been a bus driver and was not sure that the roundabout would be big enough for all buses that used the station.
- It was asked who would maintain the new surface. SB could not answer that yet as it was still under discussion with ABC, Southeastern and others.

**Sainsbury's extension:** JB had submitted comments on the layout of the car park of the extended Sainsbury's. The Forum welcomes Sainsbury's commitment and investment in new foot-cycle path to the new M20 bridge. Whilst the proposed design has only a single road crossing, there were concerns that it was on a hairpin bend, requiring the user to look over their shoulder in both directions before crossing. There was also concern that the road would be very congested as all the traffic would be going the same way instead of dividing at the entrance.

The application has since been revised as the retail unit previously occupied by Curry's is to be demolished. Further comments could be submitted as the application had not yet been decided.

**Cycle/ Foot path maintenance:** it was noted that no vegetation had been cut back this year, other than by volunteers. KHS used the excuse that they had to wait until the birds had finished nesting. It was pointed out that brambles and branches could be hazardous and should not be left until the end of the summer. LW explained that Ashford was being used as a trial area to include cycle paths in the inspector's routine. This would include overhanging vegetation and damage to the path itself. It was pointed out that often it was the vegetation that was causing the damage so it should be cut back more vigorously and regularly. LW explained that with funding cutbacks it was unlikely this would be done. Various black-spots were drawn to her attention to pass onto KHS for action.

The section of path between Asda and New Town Road is being repaired after subsidence and root damage.

Forum members are encouraged to report all faults through the KCC Highways fault reporting system.

[http://www.kent.gov.uk/roads\\_and\\_transport/highway\\_maintenance/fault\\_reporting.aspx](http://www.kent.gov.uk/roads_and_transport/highway_maintenance/fault_reporting.aspx)

#### **Any Other Business**

1. JB asked why the new Victoria Way did not include a cycle path. LW advised him to contact Jamie Watson of KHS to discuss this matter.
2. LW explained that she would be going on maternity leave from 5<sup>th</sup> October. She would not be replaced in her absence but she would provide an e mail address on her departure for any comments ACWF wanted to make. She encouraged the group to apply for funding as Sustrans would match contributions made by other funders.

**Meeting closed:** 9 pm

**Next meeting date:** Tuesday 9 November 7pm.

**NEW VENUE:** The next meeting will be held hosted by Adrian Steele at MAF Offices at the Henwood, Ashford, TN24 8DH,