

Spokes Chairman's report for the AGM on 25 March 2024

Spokes has continued to work, often behind the scenes, to campaign and press for improvements for cyclists in our East Kent area. We have worked with local cycling forums where they exist, and try to influence decisions in those areas, such as Dover and Ashford where there is no forum. The latter is difficult where we have no local members reporting to us.

Spokes acts as the forum for Canterbury council area in addition to doing what we can elsewhere. Many of our committee are connected to Sustrans or are Sustrans Rangers.

From the last AGM minutes, there are mentions of the Bull path in Canterbury and the Gt Stour way's unsafe cattle grids. In each case we continually press for action. The matter of the Bull path has been referred to Canterbury CC and evidence has been produced of photographs showing past cycle use, apart from the bridge design with higher railings. We hope this will see the path on the map in future.

The committee decided that we do not need two gazebos so it was agreed to donate one to the Folkestone forum- Cycle Shepway, who were in need.

RIDES: We have continued to organise monthly rides and whilst attendance is low, mainly around 4 or 5 riders, they have been enjoyed by those present. The shorter rides for inexperienced or less confident cyclist have been the most popular.

Activities: we used our gazebo on two events this summer, the first being the Walmer sports event on the Green. Whilst the council was disappointed with the total turnout, we found it useful to be able to talk to local cyclists and several local councillors, one of whom we assisted in trying to set up a local forum. Unfortunately, we have had no reply or further information from him. We also attended the Chartham fete, just off the Gt Stour Way, and this was similarly successful with making local contacts, including councillors.

Campaigning etc: During this year there have been several important events, in particular, the "Levelling Up" funds and the Kent Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plans. We have put in Spokes cyclists' views to both consultations and here I must thank Oliver Waldron for the considerable work he put into the Levelling Up response. The former consultation closed in January and I left it to local committee members to put together theirs and Spokes comments re their areas, whilst I focussed on the links between the towns in my area. I attended the consultation meeting in Canterbury and felt that it was worthwhile discussing the proposals I had put to them, especially for a drastic re routing of their proposal which appeared to ignore the topography and used main A roads. The consultants commented that it was what they wanted as they had not examined routes on the ground, so hopefully we will see progress.

Our committee, especially Matt, has been active concerning the Borstal Hill proposals at Whitstable, though with little immediate success. However, we hope that our comments will be taken into account in any similar future developments.

One Canterbury problem has been the demand for city centre cycle parking, resulting in complaints from commuting cyclists. Spokes contacted CCC and eventually extracted a reply from Ruth Goudie that they were considering the matter in general and hoped to start work in the near future. We will continue to watch this for action. We have already contacted other organisations for their support on this, and we hope to meet or ride around with Cllr Ricketts in the Spring.

In the wider area we have been pressing for resurfacing of the Fordwich way, but the recent sale of land appears to mean that the current funding window has been lost. We will continue to do what we can.

One area wide matter which has caused severe problems on NCR2 near Dover, and that is where the KCC film unit has authorised closure for filming. I have been aware of this on the route each side of Dover in recent times and no diversions have been in place. After complaints from the National Trust as well as from me, the Coastguard and others there was a meeting with the film unit and they have agreed not too close roads in this area, in future. I will watch to ensure that the same applies to the traffic free section west of Dover.

For the future, we are continuing to examine & comment on various planning matters in our area, specially those around Canterbury, the continual problem of bikes, especially non standard ones, on trains, and road closures where the contractors have not catered for cyclists.

My final comment is a general one. Last year, with my Sustrans hat on I was asked to help KCC & Sustrans with some training for County Councillors by the Active Travel team. They then had insufficient numbers so the event was postponed to 27 February. It gave us the chance to press the cyclists case to councillors and I hope this will be of future benefit.

Finally, I would like to thank the committee for all their hard work. I'm sure they will not mind if I say that most of us are in the older era, so it is good to see that we have recruited a younger and enthusiastic member in Oliver. We need more younger input & ideas to keep our work going for the future.

Paul Rees
Chairman Spokes East Kent Cycle Campaign
25 March 2024

