

Editorial

One of the reasons that I am a keen bicycle user is because I see it as part of the solution to the environmental mess we humans have concocted and continue to flounder, ever more perilously, in. Transport is a key consideration and has to be addressed if we are to reduce our carbon footprint but I do not just ride a bike or edit Spokes in a transport vacuum.

The Government is about to unleash upon us a 'deregulated' planning system through the 'Localism Bill'. Our planning system will become primarily a conduit for economic growth through the introduction of a new mafia like system working through opaque structures and bribery. Believe me, the protection of the environment and pro bicycle measures will amount to less than bicycle bells.

There will be a new presumption to grant planning permission for sustainable development-sustainable as usual meaning all things to all men. Bribery is to be endorsed in the Bill and greater powers will be given to business led partnerships like the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to make policy decisions that ought to be left to elected councillors.

Imagine for example, if the LEP comes forward with a massive housing and new road scheme with money allocated to it from Government through the New Homes Bonus and/or Regional Growth Fund. The chosen developers offer the local authority Community Infrastructure Levy money so that the local authority can refill its depleted coffers. What policy and planning proposals do you think will prevail? How will elected councillors be able to effectively challenge an unwanted proposal and represent their electors?

This Government is proposing corruption disguised as localism. I urge everyone to go into top gear and pedal against the Localism Bill before it is too late.

Chairman's Ramblings

One thing everyone is noticing—and this is probably a knock on effect caused by high fuel prices—is far more people utilising the humble bicycle for their local transport needs. More people also seem to be using public transport and that too is welcome. I'm uncertain whether we are finally seeing a fall in car ownership as reported by Oxford University, but people are certainly doing less mileage by car.

It was the oil crisis combined with the high casualty figures on the roads that paved the way for a real sustainable transport revolution in Holland and other countries in the 70s. In Holland a campaign was started in the early 70's called "Stop de Kindermoord" (Stop the Child Murder). Accident figures in the UK, unlike the price of oil, are actually on the decline. One of the reasons why child mortality rates are lower here is partially due to children being closeted within the home; life outside our front doors is considered too dangerous.

A campaign that is gathering pace throughout the country and I believe will eventually penetrate Kent's political world is 20's Plenty for Us. Sustrans too is launching their new campaign Free Range Kids which similarly deals with reducing speed limits to 20mph. Both campaigns are about town-wide 20 mph zones and not just short sections of 20mph outside schools. Both Campaigns are also about improving the quality of life within our urban landscape, making our towns, villages and more importantly our streets safer and nicer places to live work and play. These campaigns are about giving people choice and creating change and real sustainability. The government has recently cut the red tape making speed reduction to 20mph a lot easier for councils to implement. In the 2010 British Social Attitudes Survey reported that 71% of people are in favour of 20mph speed limits for residential streets. If this is the case then there is really little excuse and our politicians should be more supportive, after all aren't they supposed to be serving the public interest?

Spokes will be collaborating with both campaigns so as to make 20's Plenty and Free Range Kids a reality in Kent. See <http://www.20splentyforus.org.uk/> and <http://www.sustrans.org.uk/> for information on campaigns and visit our website. There's plenty of material supporting 20mph on the Department of Transport website. One page of note is <http://nds.coi.gov.uk/clientmicrosite/Content/Detail.aspx?ClientId=202&NewsAreaId=2&ReleaseID=419854&SubjectId=36>

Steve Fawke

Around most of the world in 11 and a half months by an invigorated former Canterbury resident!

There are of course multiple themes that one can pick out from my journey. Let's cast aside bad-planning and poor navigation for now. My ride was, in every way, an adventure. For me, adventure is a state of mind. It is removing ourselves from our comfort zone; setting out to do something different, to go somewhere new (literally or metaphorically.) I found adventure by riding into the unknown, surviving on less than £3 a day and living a permanently nomadic lifestyle. I supplemented that with the added thrill of having no idea where I would end up. I set parameters within which I would operate, such as 'don't talk to anyone who points a gun at you,' or just as importantly, 'don't cheat and take a ride in a car.' Other than my Golden Rules, anything went. I learned the value of committing 100% to every cause, and found that key correlation between hard work and reward. There are few greater feelings than finding yourself on top of a 10,000-foot mountain after being convinced you were going to die of exhaustion barely five minutes earlier. I chanced my arm, and spoke to people that I probably had no right to speak to. However, when a New Zealand government official is so enthralled by what you're doing that he grants you free passage across the Pacific, its easy to feel vindicated in these decisions. These are the ways and places in which I found adventure. The point is though, you don't have to cycle to China in order to achieve that, and I'm sure that's comforting to hear! Adventure is all around us, and riding a bicycle is like having a magic key to unlock it. The whole gamut of emotions is available through the humble bicycle – us cyclists know what it is to experience true ecstasy and fear; joy and terror – and those can be found as easily on the streets of Canterbury as they can in the mountains of Cambodia!

Adventure can be picking a point on a map and then trying to cycle there, or it can be just taking a different route home. I make a living now from telling people the importance of taking risks, and I firmly believe that this gives us a greater sense of vitality than anything else.

There's a world of possibilities waiting for us just outside the door. There is so much out there to be achieved, explored and enjoyed, that surely each second counts. Adventure invigorates me, it makes me more productive, efficient and crucially, it makes me happier than anything else can. It is a mindset, an attitude and a choice.

I am yet to meet the man who regrets a life spent in pursuit of adventure.

Leon McCarron

Big Wheel of Kent 2011

The BWoK rides and the festival in Dane John Gardens were a success in spite of the rain that set in during the afternoon. We ran all planned 19 rides and interestingly the longer rides, such as the 34 mile ride from Rochester, were the most popular. The Dane John cycle festival consisted of 33 stands representing cycle shops, Dr Bike, a number of charities we collaborate with, Greenpeace and other organizations promoting sustainability, free massage, and a range of food outlets. The music was provided by Cocos Lovers, The Barrett Brothers and four groups from Strummerville. The Lord Mayor of Canterbury Cllr Ian Tomas welcomed the crowds as they arrived. He said: "Cycling is fun and suitable for all ages. This wonderfully successful event has helped to showcase the growing importance that cycling can have in our everyday lives. I was also very impressed at the number of organizations that took part."

We were disappointed that so few SPOKES members took part in the event. Only 14 members registered for the rides (out of about 450) – about 3%. Are we doing something wrong? What sort of activities would YOU like? We really want your feedback. Please let us know by emailing me. In July we will review whether we should run the Big Wheel of Kent next year, and if so what form it should take and when it should be held. So we need your input.

Many thanks to the committee and to the other SPOKES members, who led rides and helped out in Dane John Gardens.

Ben Knox - Email: vice-chair@spokeseastkent.org.uk



We have email addresses for about two-thirds of our members. Please could you email our membership secretary with your membership number in the subject line, so that your email can be added to the membership database. We want to be able to contact you quickly to support SPOKES campaigns. The email address is: membership@spokeseastkent.org.uk

Please get to the editor all articles and photographs for the next newsletter by mid September 2011.