

## **Cycling Officers: Effective joint working with campaigners**

This briefing is primarily aimed at Cycling Officers\* and campaigners. Cycling Officers' managers and others with an interest in cycling may also find it useful.

*\*In this briefing, when we refer to 'Cycling Officers' we mean both Cycling Officers and those who have some responsibility for cycling as a part of their job.*

### **• Introduction**

By working together, Cycling Officers and campaigners can achieve many benefits for cycling. However, achieving an effective working relationship to do this is not always straightforward. This briefing looks at the advantages of working together, considers some possible differences in situations and perspectives and suggests some practical actions that Cycling Officers and campaigners can take towards working together effectively.

### **• Problems & opportunities**

It is frequently said that if you ask two cyclists for their opinion, they will come up with at least four or five of them for you. Cyclists<sup>1</sup> and everyone working in cycling have points of view, passions, prejudices, perspectives and a purpose – and passion generates energy that can be channelled into positive results. Combining the efforts of campaigners and officers can, for example:

- Enable concerted action towards a unified goal
- Establish 'strength in numbers' - it is more difficult for others to dismiss cycling as a marginal activity
- Maximise time and effort
- Help with co-ordination: it avoids setting up cycling events that clash with each other (meaning both events have a lower turn-out); and avoids creating facilities that are not a priority
- Create a 'professional' image for cycling
- Make it easier and more attractive for new people to get involved with cycling

The Cycling Officer and campaigners are potentially allies as they are both working for the good of cycling. However, the Cycling Officer is employed by a local authority and is responsible for implementing its policies. Working in a local authority environment can be very bureaucratic, making getting anything done extremely time-consuming. Conflicting objectives and perspectives within a council's different departments can also create difficulties for the Cycling Officer who may experience constraints such as:

- The Road Safety Team delivers cycle training, but insists trainees must wear helmets, missing some important potential trainees;
- The Parks Department is against allowing cycling through parks;
- Conservationists insist that cobbled streets must stay and/or be reinstated despite being very uncomfortable for cycling;
- The Parking Team refuses to get rid of car parking spaces and replace them with cycle parking: parked cars earn them revenue, cycle stands don't;
- Budget allocations – money is available to incorporate cycle facilities into a scheme but no money is provided to promote the facilities – i.e. to inform potential local users about the facility or to maintain it;
- Reluctance to do anything that is or is perceived as being 'anti car'.



On a more positive note, there may well be other people within the authority in other departments and elected members who cycle and / or are in favour of cycling. Linking up with them can be very beneficial for the Cycling Officer and campaigners.

• **Why is it sometimes difficult to work together?**

<b>Campaigners may:</b>	<b>Cycling Officers may:</b>
Fundamentally disagree with the strategy adopted by the local authority and on principle disagree with everything else the authority does	Feel isolated and find it difficult to keep motivated in what can sometimes be a hostile environment in the council
Believe that the work the authority has done to date is misguided and ineffective	Have to work within constraints resulting from historical factors
Perceive that nothing is happening Feel bewildered by the local authority's systems and structures	Be working very hard but struggling with the bureaucracy and producing no immediate results
Consider the person in the Cycling Officer role lacks crucial skills and experience	Feel intimidated as campaigners appear to know the local area better than they do; be more proficient cyclists; and have strong relationships with councillors
Be exasperated by inaction on small matters that are cheap to fix & make a big difference to the cyclist (such as a badly installed dropped kerb on a key route)	Have a massive workload, as the only person in the authority who deals with cycling issues - they must be ruthless about prioritising
Feel aggrieved that they, as 'cycle users', were not consulted about schemes and people with little or no expertise in cycling installed the cycle facilities	Be frustrated as they were not consulted on schemes, or were consulted but none of their views was taken on board
Disagree amongst themselves Be angry as they are giving up their time voluntarily for cycling and perceive that public money is being misspent	Find it difficult to set up a constructive dialogue with campaigners as they have differing views
Take a 'single issue approach' that only considers cyclists (which can backfire)	Be working to wider policy objectives (such as increased bus use) that reduces car traffic and thus can benefit cyclists

Despite some of the possible barriers, effective joint working between local authorities and campaigners does happen. So, even if your current situation is difficult, it can change. Sometimes it can be down to personalities and one person moving on can change things considerably.

• **How can Cycling Officers & campaigners work together effectively?**

**1. Communicate**

Tensions can build up purely due to ineffective communication, so reviewing arrangements helps:

- How do you communicate at present?
- Do you know if, from their point of view, it works? If not, how can you find out?
- What is the best medium? Face-to-face? E-mail? Telephone? Web? Letter? Regular bulletins?
- Who needs to know what? When? In what way?
- Make suggestions and explore how to establish efficient and effective communication
- Listen to the other parties involved

<b>Campaigners – Key Questions</b>	<b>Cycling Officer - Key Questions</b>
Is the officer aware of the different interest groups and the overlaps & differences, e.g. Cycling UK, Sustrans, the local campaign groups & others? Does the Cycling Officer have all the relevant contact details? Is it straightforward for the local authority to consult you & other cycle users?	Do campaigners have all the relevant contact details so that they can liaise directly with the relevant part of the council to: - report on maintenance problems such as potholes? - make enquiries about development control issues? - write to councillors
Are you keeping up to speed with local developments?	Are you ensuring that the campaigners feel consulted?
Are you engaging at the optimal level?	At what level(s) do you want to engage? Countywide? Borough?

**2. Be aware of the other person's situation**

By finding out about the other person's situation and appreciating how this can influence their behaviour and actions, you can make the most of what each of you has to offer for the development and promotion of cycling.

<b>Campaigner's situation</b>	<b>Cycling Officer's situation</b>
Can operate more freely, less constrained by pressures such as funding and funders, job descriptions and so on	Appreciates sensitivity: needs to consider his status with his/her peers, can rarely act alone and often has to proceed diplomatically
Can speak freely and so challenge anti-cycling sentiments expressed publicly	Wishes to avoid being embroiled in public controversy
May help solve problems creatively	Committed to promoting cycling, but may follow Design Guidelines to the letter, which can restrain continuous cycle passage
In a shire county a campaigner may be able to develop a good relationship with the local officers and help them with local knowledge and cycling matters	In a shire county, the Cycling Officer may have overall responsibility for directing cycling improvements across the county and managing county-wide cycling projects. District level colleagues may have devolved responsibility for cycling and provide the main interface between county and the local cycle forum /campaigners. These officers do not necessarily have the experience and knowledge base of the Cycling Officer.

### 3. Adopt constructive mindsets

- Be pragmatic and realistic
- Be willing to consider other points of view
- Don't remove the scope for discussion by insisting that you are right and there is only one way
- Have a win-win mindset
- Deal with the present and future – i.e. let go of history where it is unhelpful
- Work together to keep everybody motivated and enthused
- Build a relationship of mutual respect, trust and confidentiality
- Be open to offers - the help people wish to give may not be exactly what you had in mind, but accepting the offer may help to develop good relationships
- Thank people for help and give praise whenever you have the opportunity (positive strokes can achieve a great deal)

Campaigners	Cycling Officer
Maintain a balance between co-operating with the authority, but keep them on their toes when necessary	Be aware that the campaigner has a 'job' to do and will be challenging on occasions. Their intention is to do the best for cycling. Don't take it personally.
Be diplomatic but do not compromise on principles. Cycling UK's Local Campaigners are campaigning on the organisation's behalf, so expected to promote & adhere to our stated, formal policies.	Be diplomatic  Can you use the campaigners as consultees on schemes?
Decide when detail is helpful and when it distracts from the bigger picture	Decide what you want to achieve and determine the best mechanisms to suit your aim.
Be an interface between other local campaigners and cycle users in general Make links in your local area – in a shire county, link up with cycling campaigners in other areas	Decide on how best to engage with campaigners and how you can best use your limited time to make the most of all the different inputs campaigners have to offer
Be aware that other cycle users and campaigners may not share your views and decide how best to manage this to avoid unproductive meetings/ exchanges with the local authority	Cycle campaigners and local users do not necessarily all have the same interests. In your area, you may have a local cycle campaign group or more
Be the eyes and ears for the local Cycling Officer	Be aware of the campaigners' situations – lack of time, legitimate grievances with the council or past experiences that colour their dealings with you
Where helpful, write to the press in a courteous, upbeat and positive manner to challenge anti-cycling views. Talk about 'cycling' rather than 'cyclists'. The former is more difficult to attack.	Can you get campaigners to write to councillors when you need support?



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- its purpose?
- How and when does it meet? Are the dates set well ahead, so Forum members can have the best chance of attending?
- How is it chaired? Who sets the agenda? Who takes minutes?
- Who is present? Senior officers and councillors? A hard core of cycle campaigners? Cycling UK's reps? Other stakeholders such as the police, health professionals? Cycle users who are not campaigners?
- Do you want a diverse membership that represents the broader interests of cycle users?
- Setting up Working Groups or Special Interest Groups (SIGs) to meet outside the Forum? Not everyone needs to be involved in everything, SIGs could be: 'Technical & engineering', 'Marketing & promotion', 'Training'. You may not need to attend every SIG meeting.

## CONCLUSION

If local authority officers, campaigners and local cycle users are willing to discuss their differences, find common ground and devise a way of effectively working together, cycling wins. Above all, by demonstrating effective joint working between the various parties, it becomes more possible for those in more senior positions to engage with the issues relating to cycling.

### ○ Case Study 1

#### **CRISP (Cycle Route Implementation & Stakeholder Plan)**

The London Cycle Network + (LCN+) together with Cycling Centre of Excellence at Transport for London (TfL) have developed a process called CRISP (Cycle Route Implementation and Stakeholder Plan) for application to LCN+ Links.

The CRISP process involves a systematic review of existing conditions on an LCN+ Link taking full account of local concerns opportunities and constraints. The Cycling Officer and key stakeholders go out on site together to assess the route before the design has been developed. This is so users can input into the process at an early stage before key decisions are made. This approach varies from the more usual one whereby campaigners and other parties go out separately and then report back and discuss issues.

The Final CRISP reports provide the highway or other appropriate authority with a strategy for scheme implementation for LCN+ Links that will support scheme development and provide justification and a basis for future funding bids. <http://www.londoncyclenetwork.org.uk/>

### ○ Case Study 2

#### **Leicester City**

Leicester's Cycle-City-Workshop is a monthly meeting of cycle activists facilitated by the Council's Cycling Co-ordinator. The Cycle-City Workshop differs from the standard cycle forum, the latter generally meet six – eight times per year and include a wider range of attendees. Cycle-City Workshop is an informal working group that meets monthly and brings together people to promote

all aspects of cycling across the City.

Monthly meetings of key stakeholders mean it is:

- 'hands on' - working on live issues and projects
- easier to keep track of issues and meet crucial deadlines
- possible to develop productive working relationships between the different participants

The workshop receives regular contributions from local bike projects, advocate groups and from relevant and useful organisations. <http://www.leicester.gov.uk>

○ **Case Study 3**

**Kings Lynn – Bike Users Group (BUG) / Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Cycle Forum**

The Kings Lynn Bike Users Group is one example of a mechanism for putting forward bike users' views to the Cycle Forum. The Forum covers Kings Lynn and district but tends to focus more on Kings Lynn issues. The Forum includes a range of stakeholders and members decide on the agenda for the meetings, which gives them more ownership and a chance to influence priorities and the Borough Councillor chairs the meeting. The BUG meetings happen in advance of Forum meetings so that they can gather views from the BUG to put forward at the Forum. The Forum meets every two months and 10 – 12 people attend. Its members are consulted and have the opportunity to influence decisions and share concerns with relevant people from the council. <http://www.klwnbug.co.uk>

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<sup>1</sup> A possible definition of 'cyclists' is: people who have a commitment to cycling as a hobby or transport mode to the point where there is an emotional attachment that retains their interest even when not using the cycle.