

My cycling

A recent project involved refurbishing bikes with refugees



ANTHONY JOHNSON

Anthony Johnson volunteers for Nottingham BikeWorks, a cycle workshop involved with the Big Bike Revival

I've been a member since the 1970s. I changed to life membership when I retired as a promise to myself that I would cycle for as long as I could. I've always toured on my bike and, now I'm retired, I have time to cycle even more. As I've grown older (I'm 63), it's the other activities of Cycling UK that have become more important to me – and these directly mirror some of the work we do at Nottingham BikeWorks.

Nottingham BikeWorks started in October 2014 as a not-for-profit Community Interest Company. Tom Barber was the creative force behind it and is the Executive Director. I've known Tom for years, and when I retired from my job as a head teacher, Tom asked me if I wanted to volunteer. He knew my long-term interest in all things cycling.

There is another Anthony, who is employed as chief mechanic. (He is 'Anthony the younger'; I am 'Anthony the wise'.) All three of us are Cycling UK members. There are upwards of 20 volunteers who give differing levels of time and expertise to Nottingham BikeWorks. We have a sales area, a professional workshop, and eight work stations for trainees of all levels. We plan to offer City and Guilds accredited workshop training courses.

Our aim is to support people using bikes

“OUR AIM IS TO SUPPORT PEOPLE USING BIKES AS EVERYDAY TRANSPORT”

as everyday transport. Tom wanted to use cycling to engage disadvantaged and marginalised groups – those on low incomes, out of work, refugees, and those struggling within mainstream education. Nottingham BikeWorks uses the appeal of 'tinkering with bikes': learning how to mend them, improve them, and consequently to enjoy the thrill of riding them.

We repair and refurbish donated cycles to sell to students, commuters, and those new to cycling who can't afford a new one. We also repair customers' bikes. These two activities give us our main income source and help subsidise our other work. For example, we have just finished an extended project with ten young local refugees, giving them each a donor bike, helping them strip, respray, and rebuild the bike, and checking it over before they take ownership of the bike.

For the Big Bike Revival last year, we

delivered Dr Bike repair sessions to five secondary schools and organised four public events. People brought along their tired and broken bikes and we restored over 300 to roadworthy condition. We also had other attractions like our smoothie-making bike and our collection of crazy bikes. But, most importantly, we talked to people, putting over our love of cycling and letting them know what support was available for cyclists in the Nottingham area.

We are getting involved with the Big Bike Revival again this year. We plan to provide a Dr Bike service to commuters at five local businesses in the hope we can develop longer term relationships with them, and in turn, use these businesses to provide funding to support Dr Bike sessions for local communities. We are laying on two of our own events to promote cycling, where we hope to sell very cheaply some renovated children's bikes and offer cut-price servicing. We will also be at the Nottingham Riverside Festival in August, offering bike repairs.

Nottingham BikeWorks is based in an old lace factory. It's just around the corner from where the original Raleigh factory was sited. This January, we had the Grand Opening of our Raleigh Community Workshop, where cycling historian Tony Hadland gave a talk. We found out that our building may well have been used for Raleigh assembly in the late nineteenth century. The present incarnation of Raleigh Cycles, based out in Eastwood, has given us great assistance in purchasing quality tools for the workshop. ●

For more on Nottingham BikeWorks, visit nottinghambikeworks.org.uk. For more on the Big Bike Revival, turn to page 52.