



Cycle Kirklees: Kirklees Cycling Campaign Report for 22-23

1. Overview of Year (Co-Chair, Chas Ball)

Despite our efforts in 2022/23, we are unable to report much progress in the provision of better facilities for cycling. Cycling activities are thriving in some parts of Kirklees but dedicated cycling facilities have hardly changed over the last few years. As a result, growth of everyday cycling appears to have stalled.

To increase cycling as a means of transport and a leisure activity, the public needs more safe routes. We believe we will begin to see an increase in all forms of cycling once there is an increase in access to more dedicated cycling facilities, more cycle parking infrastructure, and more support for those wanting to start or resume cycling. In contrast, we have had an increasing number of route closures on our traffic free greenways and on-street cycle paths blocked by parked cars, or the markings so faded they appear invisible.

To tackle the deficiencies in cycling provision, Cycle Kirklees has made a substantial number of submissions to consultations, lodged planning objections where we deemed plans inadequate or contradictory to active travel, run two public events and acted as advocates within local government and social media.

In response to a continued absence of a strategic plans for route development, we prepared our own ideas for a future network of cycle routes for Kirklees comprehensively mapped by Chris Knight (co-chair). These proposals were taken to Kirklees Active Travel Partnership (ATP) and we believe will assist in the development of the Kirklees Transport Strategy.

Cycle Kirklees submitted formal objections to several strategic planning applications – notably on the Amazon warehouse proposals near Scholes (Cleckheaton), alongside the Spenn Valley Greenway, which was not approved. We also lodged an objection to aspects of the proposed extensive housing and industrial development at Chidswell and Heybeck (east of Dewsbury and Batley) next to Ossett and south Leeds. It was approved but is potentially subject to a judicial review.

Traffic free route (greenway) closures were an issue in recent months. Cyclists are unhappy at the level of closure, the lack of notification and the inability of Network Rail and Kirklees Council to recognise the needs of cyclists and pedestrians. Providing access to alternative routes when paths are subject to long term closure is often possible but has been overlooked or responsibility denied. These closures are more than a minor irritation to both travel to work and leisure cyclists on the main traffic free routes we enjoy in Kirklees. Their absence often underlines how poor the on-road alternatives are.

We have acted as advocates for cycling facilities and improved road safety at Kirklees Scrutiny Committee and participated in quarterly meetings of Kirklees Active Travel Partnership.

Overall, we are disappointed at the progress made during 2022/23 to further the active travel commitments made by the Mayor and Kirklees Council, particularly following the cancellation in May 2022 of a £2 million programme of support for active travel through the council's former Place Partnership, without any explanation.

The challenges of the Mayor's Transport Strategy (West Yorkshire Climate and Environment Plan 2021 – 2024) are considerable but the lack of progress on capital schemes as demonstrated in the accompanying section on consultations is deeply disappointing. We recognise the commitment of specialist officers in Kirklees Council working on sustainable travel to plan a new Kirklees Transport strategy, but we have reservations about the design standards applied by highways officers. WYCA is an authority awarded the highest designation for cycling and walking in England by Active Travel England, the government's funding agency. This 'Tier 3' designation is to WYCA but applies to all West Yorkshire authorities.

2. Consultation Responses (Co-Chair, Chris Knight)

Little has been built for cycling in the past 12 months in Kirklees. Plans and consultations continue to be advertised by the council and Cycle Kirklees responds to help shape the way active travel is included in roads and towns.

There have been three town centre “blueprint” consultations in the last year to which committee members have been out to the drop-in sessions and had a walk around to visualise how the plans would change the feel of the area. The Batley Blueprint included restrictions on motor traffic from part of the high street, the Heckmondwike Blueprint would bring in a new safe route to the Spen Valley Greenway, and for all three we have pointed out the need for secure and convenient cycle parking.

The Holmfirth Blueprint has been politically charged with limited improvements for cycling other than a small 20mph zone. This zone will not be extended through the town as the council’s priority is reduced journey times – rather than pedestrian and cycling safety - as traffic flow is a requirement of the funding stream. If the objective is to shift more people to walking and cycling – a move that would make Holmfirth a more attractive place to live in or to visit – this feels like a missed opportunity to rebalance priorities.

Four major schemes previously consulted by Cycle Kirklees were back with updated proposals. There was positive progress with the Dewsbury Town Centre improvements; we have been working with Kirklees officers to develop the cycle infrastructure into an attractive, safe, and connected network. Sadly, the need for carriageway space has meant that a link to the Dewsbury-Batley-Chidswell proposals has not been agreed, though we will keep trying.

Dewsbury-Batley-Chidswell consultation came out with more details and although it does add a few kilometres on cycle infrastructure it fails to connect to either Dewsbury, Batley, or Chidswell. A section of greenway along a disused railway line between Jack Lane and Rouse Mill Lane will mean that there will be no safe access to many trip generators along Bradford Road and there is no safe way to get to Batley town centre. Consultants involved in the design of this scheme informed us that politicians did not want any parking removed within Batley wards.

Calderdale Council spearheaded a consultation on the A641 between Huddersfield and Bradford. Revolutionary cycle infrastructure including CYCLOPS junctions and cycle tracks that are clearly meant to be the start of a full network of safe routes were evident north of the Kirklees boundary, but this all stopped on the border. Cycle tracks along the A641 to Bradley Bar from Brighouse ended here unceremoniously. Instead, only the widening of the Bradley-Birkby Greenway and a couple of newly surfaced connections will be taking place in Kirklees.

For the second round of Huddersfield Rail Connections consultations, designers had ignored most of public opinion responses from the first consultation. Plans for Northumberland Street were watered down to the option from the first consultation with the least public approval being selected - our 3rd choice. As with some of the previous plans this scheme would fail to link with other proposals and existing infrastructure. It provided no way north from Trinity Street, no route to the Phase 4 of the A629 Halifax Road, left a 400m gap for people travelling towards the Birkby-Bradley Greenway, and a substandard connection to the new Leeds Road corridor.

Whilst we have taken opportunities to meet with officers online to make more of a case for cycling and to try and influence better design choices it is clear that some of our Highways designers are a long way behind those in Leeds in adopting the spirit of LTN/120 - guidance for local authorities on designing high-quality, safe cycle infrastructure from the Department for Transport.

Committee members with Leah Stuart (chair, Huddersfield Unlimited Transport Group) recently attended a site visit to review the newly constructed Leeds Road (A62) corridor. We were able to provide a detailed critique of safety and general design issues many of which we had either highlighted during the consultation phases or raised concerns about some that were not visible on the consultation plans.

Whilst the official line from Kirklees Council was that the scheme had been delayed for some redesigning once LTN 1/20 had come out, it appears to us that delays are largely attributable to contract issues and little of the new standard announced in 2020 has been incorporated.

Earlier in the year we also attended a site visit to the recently opened Colne Valley Greenway on the Huddersfield Narrow Canal towpath now with hard surfacing from Kirklees College to Slaithwaite. The Canal & River Trust took us through plans to improve the accessibility of key parts of the route, whilst retaining important heritage features. Along with the Experience Community team, we were also able to highlight some of the other access restrictions affecting this route.

Consultations on road schemes are sometimes notified to us and we aim to advise on how design would affect cyclists of all abilities, but we have not always been made aware of consultations. For example, the changes to the roundabout at Birkenshaw were made without our influence and sadly the result is of no use for people cycling.

As a result of our persistence, Cycle Kirklees has recently been added to the 'G-List' of groups to be consulted on all new schemes. At the point where we receive plans, they are not yet public so we are not able to share details, but we hope that by being involved earlier in changes to road layouts it is more likely they will be constructed with an acceptable standard of cycle infrastructure.

Recently, a new safety scheme is being developed for White Lee Road in Heckmondwike which includes cycle tracks and toucan crossings. This scheme repeats mistakes we have identified on Leeds Road, Huddersfield including incorrect use of kerbs and tactile paving, inadequate shared use facilities, motor vehicle priority at junctions that should have active travel priority, and no planning for future connectivity. Whilst we have made it clear that the design choices in this scheme are outdated, fail to meet the design guidance, and do not effectively support the road hierarchy, it is obvious that the officers involved lack the understanding, skills and experience to design and develop cycle infrastructure that will protect people on bikes and encourage more cycling for everyday journeys.

3. *Improving Local Walking and Cycling Networks* conference report

Cycle Kirklees jointly organised a conference with Huddersfield Civic Society with a focus on Greenways in Kirklees including discussion about on-street cycling infrastructure, footpaths and support for active travel in the

planning process. The event at New North Road Baptist Church in Huddersfield was attended by sixty people representing cyclists, pedestrians and ramblers on Saturday 5th November 2022.

Speakers included Leah Stuart (Chair Transport Group, Huddersfield Unlimited) on the benefits of active travel to the town's economy, community health and climate; Kit Allwinter (former Active Travel Policy Advisor, WYCA) and Graham West (Service Director, Kirklees Highways and Streetscene). Graham warned that as funding becomes more constrained some of our ambitions would be difficult to achieve.

The open discussion resulted in two main conclusions. First on the need for a comprehensive network plan for active travel in Kirklees - in particular to make sure that planning for new developments and route upgrades are integrated into an agreed network plan. Secondly, there is a need for a more coordinated approach of all active travel stakeholders to facilitate a stronger voice for walking and cycling measures.

4. Committee, Membership & Communications

Cycle Kirklees has run two events on improving cycling and walking networks. The firstly on 5th November was a live event followed by an online event on 24th January featuring a Sustrans contribution.

The Executive Committee has met mainly online with two face to face meetings (in Huddersfield and in Batley). Its membership: Chas Ball & Chris Knight (co-chairs); Bill Hunter (Secretary); Daniel Little (Treasurer); Rutger Clarke and Andrew Dunlop.

Communication with members has improved with 10 Cycle Kirklees Newsletters published since our AGM in May 2022 – they are all on www.cyclekirklees.org.uk. The content of our website has developed over the year and has been maintained by committee members, supported by Wrathweb (Hepworth). There are over 200 members and although we currently have no membership fee the committee will be tabling a proposal on funding our work.

Chas Ball
3rd July 2023