

## **Push Bikes' final submission to Transport, Connectivity & Sustainability Scrutiny Committee session on cycling in Birmingham.**

### **Introduction:**

This submission looks specifically at a few ways in which planning for cycling and listening to cyclists can be formalised in the way in which BCC works. The 3 topics are developing a Cycling SPD, changes to the Pedestrian & Cycling Task Force and changes to the Cyclists Forum. The goal is to try to avoid a continuation of the 'talk shop' syndrome that afflicts both the Task Force and the Forum, and to assist planners in taking cycling into account from the start of the design process. These proposals are low cost actions that can be implemented straight away, to help achieve higher levels of sustainable transport in Birmingham.

### **A Cycling SPD:**

#### **Existing issues:**

At the moment, planners, as part of their Transport Plan, submit cut-and-paste sections on cycling. These are bland, generic and meaningless on the whole. From discussions with people responsible for drawing up these Transport Plans, it becomes apparent that they do not know how their Transport Plans can fit into supporting cycling in Birmingham. Far more time and effort is spent on motor traffic impact analysis, stretching to 30 or 40 pages normally, because there are clear requirements laid out in planning documents on that.

At a time when there are limited funds available from BCC for improving cycle infrastructure, but with a projected population growth of over 100,000 in Birmingham over the next 20 years and a shortage of housing, BCC needs to utilise funds from major developments to improve cycling conditions in Birmingham. Encouraging higher rates of cycling offers a solution to the transport chaos this population growth threatens, but we are not utilising funding from developments effectively.

#### **Solution:**

A Cycling Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is needed, which will give planners clear guidelines on how they can contribute to cycling in Birmingham. A Cycling SPD is also necessary for asking for Section 278 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds from developers. In particular, CIL requires that new developments pay towards the cost of the infrastructure required to support that development – clearly transport infrastructure is part of that. BCC currently plans to have a CIL in place in April 2014. To access the funds for cycling infrastructure that that will make available, there must be an up-to-date cycling infrastructure needs assessment. A Cycling SPD would provide a clear plan on which to base requests for this funding – it can not be emphasised strongly enough that without a clear infrastructure plan for cycling, these funds can not be accessed.

#### **Content of a Cycling SPD:**

This should include (but is not limited to):

- (1) An aspirational plan for a network of cycling routes in Birmingham. This must be a

cohesive network, which offers direct routes for cyclists and provides a comfortable environment for nervous cyclists. Centres and important amenities must be interconnected, with a mesh width of 250 metres or less. (See CROW, 2007, pgs 65 to 66, table 8) BCC already identifies a strategic network of roads for motorised traffic, but it must be remembered that a strategic network for bicycles may well utilise roads that are considered 'minor' for motorised traffic. It is essential that this second strategic network is identified clearly for developers.

- (2) Recommendation of a set of infrastructure standards for planners to refer to. The 2010 Bike Birmingham Strategy sets a target of producing an updated best practice for cycle design by mid-2013, but until that is finished, these publications could be recommended:
1. The current DfT LTN 2/08, Cycling Infrastructure Design, provides clear minimum standards for bicycle infrastructure which are a good basis for building a cycle network in the UK, supplementing the guidance given in the DfT's Manual for Streets.
  2. The Dutch Design Manual for Bicycle Traffic, published in English by CROW (<http://www.crow.nl/nl/Publicaties/publicatiedetail?code=REC25>) provides a more in-depth discussion of the principles behind the design and implementation of a cycle network, which is a valuable read for British planners.

It should be noted that while these recommendations may appear rather obvious, the fiasco with the cycle paths on the Selly Oak New Road shows that there is a lack of awareness of these valuable design guides.

- (3) Guidelines on carrying out analysis of traffic flows not only of motor traffic, but also cyclists and pedestrians. Under the Traffic Management Act 2004, local authorities have a duty to manage their road network to achieve expeditious movement of traffic. While increasing the modal share of cycle traffic has the potential to improve traffic flows overall, it appears that no consideration is given to this in BCC traffic planning – as evidenced by the omission of cycle traffic in the transport analysis carried out in planning applications. A Cycling SPD needs to provide guidance on how to integrate analysis of bicycle and pedestrian traffic in the overall traffic evaluation done for planning applications, so as to realise the full potential offered by encouraging a switch in modal share.

## **The Pedestrian and Cycling Task Force:**

### **What is this?:**

The Bike Birmingham Strategy describes this as “an active group comprising experts in the field of walking and cycling and officers from Highways and Transportation Strategy to tackle infrastructure and policy issues and provide focus and input into the decision-making process.”

### **Existing issues:**

The groups who participate in this task force almost uniformly dismiss it as a 'talking shop'. For example, the shared use path through Cannon Hill Park has been the subject of repeated discussions with little visible impact from those discussions. The minutes from meetings are distributed days before the next meeting, hindering the follow-up of issues with BCC officers between meetings. The general feeling is that the Task Force does not currently contribute to the decision-making

process.

### **Solutions:**

- (1) The minutes of each meeting should be prepared and distributed to all participants within 1 week of each meeting, as well as made available through the BCC website to all interested people. This will enable groups to have a clear record of the discussion, in order to better liaise with BCC officers between meetings, as well as improving the visibility and profile of the task force.
- (2) The minutes should include SMART actions that can be checked on at the next meeting. The groups participating in the Task Force meetings will then be able to question BCC officers on what actions have been taken, assisting the Chair of the Task Force in holding officers accountable. This is essential to ensuring that input from the Task Force is acted upon, rather than having the same issues discussed endlessly.
- (3) In order to capitalise on the expertise offered by the participants of the Task Force, ways in which the Task Force can contribute to the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) activities of council officers should be considered. From the debacle at Selly Oak New Road with the cycle paths, it is clear that there is a lack of awareness of walking and cycling issues among some parts of the Highways Department at BCC, as well as other departments. The Task Force offers an important resource for CPD to fill these knowledge gaps.

## **The Cycling Forum:**

### **What is this?:**

The description from the Bike Birmingham Strategy suggests that this twice-yearly meeting is for BCC to receive ideas with Birmingham cyclists and potential cyclists, as well as passing on information about proposals, plans and activities for cycling.

### **The issues:**

It is felt by Push Bikes that the recent Cycling Forums have been more like lectures, where cyclists have been told about activities, but not really consulted properly. It has felt more like a PR event for BCC rather than a dialogue. Not all of the items on the agendas have felt relevant and there has been no evidence of any listening to ideas and suggestions, with no minutes or summary of ideas distributed for any Cycling Forum.

It has been estimated that at the last Cycling Forum, the number of 'ordinary cyclists' was fewer than the number of cycling 'hacks'. This is a clear indication that the Cycling Forums are not seen as useful or relevant by many cyclists.

### **Solutions:**

- (1) Bring the Cycling Forum into the Council House, and extend the length of the event to at least 4 hours.
  1. 1.5 to 2 hours of this are to be the main discussion.
  2. At least 2 hours, comprising of time before and after the main discussion, should be set

aside for poster displays and gathering ideas from participants.

The current location for the Cycling Forums is too much of a lecture hall, while the rooms in the Council House provide a more flexible space to allow for more inclusion of participants through different seating arrangements. Having 'break-out' sessions during the main discussion has the effect of reducing the time for the main discussion.

- (2) The Cycling Forum should be promoted as an opportunity for developers to reach cyclists with their public consultations. Having poster displays before the main discussion, and allowing several hours for participants to view and discuss these informally, will enable this public consultation to occur. Push Bikes finds that there are many issues with the planning for cycling in planning applications, but it seems that developers have problems in finding cyclists to consult during their planning process. The Cycling Forum is an ideal opportunity to provide easy access to cyclists for developers.
- (3) Any PR that BCC wants to carry out should take place in the time prior to the main discussion – through the use of poster displays. Another venue for PR is the Cycling News page on the BCC website. For the vitality of the Cycling Forum, it is important that the main discussion does not feel like a long advertisement for BCC.
- (4) A regular poster display should have a map of Birmingham for cyclists to stick notes on to highlight problems and issues. This was a popular exercise at the Cycling Forums that Push Bikes originally held, and would be a useful information collecting exercise for BCC. A summary of these issues needs to be drawn up and included with the minutes from the Cycling Forum, for public record. Ideally these would lead to some SMART targets that could be checked on at later meetings.
- (5) The main discussion should spend most of its time on a single topic, with a variety of speakers invited to contribute to the discussion. Equal time must be given to contributions from the audience, in order to facilitate a healthy debate.

A lot of the useful functions of the Cycling Forum will be carried out in the time before and after the main discussion – through interaction with the poster displays. The main discussion should serve to attract interest from cyclists and encourage them to attend the Cycling Forum. The agenda for the main discussion must be decided through consultation with cycling groups in Birmingham, as well as inviting suggestions for relevant poster displays.

- (6) The Cycling Forum should be held quarterly, with dates publicised a year in advance. At the moment it is held sporadically, with no clear schedule. This makes it difficult to plan ahead. A clear schedule is important for being able to include other groups in the planning process.