



Portsmouth Cycle Forum Annual General Meeting Chairman's report for 2012-13

Someone commented recently in The News that we are a bunch of oldies with nothing better to do and implying that we are not proper cyclists since we wear Lycra and pick fights with motorists. Like any campaigning organisation we have members from a cross-section of the community (some donning Lycra but the majority not) but my observation is that we all cycle regularly as part of our daily lives and that we work to make things better not just for ourselves but for everyone cycling in the city. Portsmouth Cycle Forum is for anyone who cycles – or wants to cycle – in and around the Portsmouth area.

Campaigning

Last year saw a national newspaper, The Times, take the unexpected turn of launching a campaign called "Cities Fit for Cycling" following the tragic death of a reporter whilst cycling. The result has been a huge discussion on the merits and otherwise of cycling and the writing of a manifesto for cycling in the UK. Portsmouth Cycle Forum has played its part in the campaign with members identifying road junctions which they felt to be dangerous for cyclists in the city. The Government has pledged money some to improve some of the worst black-spots.

20mph as a default speed limit for residential streets is another Times manifesto item and Portsmouth should be well ahead of the game, but Jon Spencer discovered through a Freedom of Information request that it is the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) policy that they do not enforce 20mph speed limits. This was escalated to the 20's Plenty national campaign and became national news following the recent House of Commons Inquiry into cycling.

Point 8 of The Times manifesto is "Every city, even those without an elected mayor, should appoint a cycling commissioner to push home reforms". Over to PCC.

Campaigns on a local level have continued with the aim of improving and extending existing network of recommended cycle routes. Portsmouth Cycle Forum is a Stakeholder in the projects associated with the Local Sustainable Transport Fund for which Portsmouth won £5million. The fund was established to enable economic growth and carbon reduction through sustainable travel modes working in partnership with the community. We suggested several priorities to be addressed and some of them will be implemented but so far the "working with the community" bit appears to be telling us "this is what we're going to do" – not quite the partnership working we had expected.

Following the extensive public consultation on the new Hub being constructed across Winston Churchill Avenue with promises that good diversionary routes would be provided for the busy cycle routes affected during the works, the reality was that the so-called provision was nothing more than a couple of signs. In addition, the bus and cycle lanes on WCR were closed forcing cyclists to use the single carriageway. We asked for a temporary speed limit reduction and were refused. After several weeks of campaigning by Charles Burns, some signs were erected advising cyclist to use the centre of the lanes. Another phase of the Somerstown regeneration has generous provision of cycle racks for visitors but of the completely obsolete and ineffective "butterfly" variety. How did this happen? Cycle hoops are the standard and they allow a lock to be passed through both frame and wheel.

Some strange changes at Lakeside (North Harbour) have occurred and challenged by Mike Dobson – the worse one being the new slip road into the Porche garage where the 20mph speed restriction starts after the pedestrian and cycle crossing. Vehicles are permitted to approach at the national speed limit – very safe! Lakeside management took it upon them to paint a white line down the centre of the pedestrian and cycle route onto the site created what is known as a shared, segregated route. That would be fine if the path was wide, but it isn't, Lakeside say that they may widen it in the future.

Northern Road bridge replacement works are in progress and we were involved in discussions regarding the provision for cycling both during and after the closure. We also commented on the temporary one-way system at Cosham for which contraflow cycling was deemed too dangerous "because of the parking".

A section of the Shipwrights Way will open soon forming a traffic-free connection between South Parade and Old Portsmouth across Southsea Common. Whilst this is most welcome, it does not address the problem of Clarence Esplanade with its outdated and dangerous echelon parking. People do like to walk, cycle and drive along the seafront and there must be a way of accommodating all needs, safely.

Community Cycle Centre

The community Cycle Centre continues to flourish under the watchful eyes of Chris, Steve, Roger and the team. Soon it will become a Community Interest Company giving it a legal status under the umbrella of the co-operative movement. People turn up on Saturday mornings in all weathers to work on bikes either carrying out repairs for people or restoring unused one for reuse in the community. The CCC has been on the road at various events and will soon offer a Dr Bike service.

Meetings, Rides and Events

With new management at Portsmouth Guildhall we were faced with a room hire fee of £50 so we decided to look elsewhere. Our bi-monthly meetings have continued at community centres and elsewhere. Our aim is to move the meeting around the city so we can truly say we are based in Portsmouth and not just one part of it. Wiggle kindly allowed us to meet at their premises in Southampton Road and we able to see the spacious and impressive workshops and vast warehousing facilities.

Our programme of family bike rides on the last Sunday of each month continues and they are organised by Jayne. Gill and Pam held bi-weekly Wednesday morning bike rides throughout the summer starting from Victoria Park and latterly the Stacey Centre.

Membership

Our membership has grown slightly this year but the biggest area of growth has been with the Facebook group which has become a lively and informative focus for discussion and debate. As with most other societies, we could do with more people to be more active in the Forum. We have a need for someone to manage a regular news bulletin. Volunteers please see me later!

The Committee

A great deal of work takes place behind the scenes and this due entirely to the hard-working committee and officers of the Forum. My thanks go to Hilary, Jayne, Kathy, Pam, Jon, Mike, Chris, Joe, Roger, Owen, Tim and Steve who have all served during the past year without who this Forum would not function.

Conclusion

I have been chairing meetings of Portsmouth Cycle Forum since 2007 following Paul Iggulden's tenure of the position. In that time we have seen many changes, faced many challenges and we have become established as a voice for cyclists in Portsmouth. I believe that we have made a difference although at times it feels like we are taking two steps forward then one step back again.

Nationally, cycling as a means of exercise and a means of transport is on the increase and I think Portsmouth is no exception although no recent figures are available. Some cities are more go ahead than others. Having visited many places in the UK I'd rate Portsmouth as somewhere in the middle – accommodating cycling where necessary but never at the expense of traffic flows or car parking since there is still a perception amongst some councillors that these are the most important issues. Portsmouth will remain "average" for cycling until there a step change in the council's outlook. One only has to look to London to see how different things can be. Love him or hate him, the Mayor of London has championed cycling and the results are can be seen throughout the capital.

On that note I will end my report and say thank you to everyone with whom I have worked and good luck to the new chairman. It's not going to be me as I've been doing the job for a long enough and it's time for someone else to have a go! I'm not going to disappear, however; I'm going to concentrate on some project work for the Forum.

John Holland
Chairman
Portsmouth Cycle Forum
14 March 2013