

CYCLEWIGHT Committee, 17 Jun 2021

Zoom joiners: Graham Biss BEM (Guest - GB). Jess Garbett (JG), Alex Lawson (AL), Malcolm Ross (MR), Tim Thorne (TT), Matt Whittaker (MWh), George Wilks (GW), Mick Watts (MWa)
Apologies: Naomi Hyland (NH)

1. West Wight route – Graham Biss

Plans and negotiations for a West Wight off-road route have been led for Isle of Wight Council by Graham Biss. Graham joined the meeting to report on progress and to ask for support from Cyclewight.

The route should be safe and attractive, sensitive to those living on the route and should not interfere with active farmsteads. To reduce cost the route aims to follow the line of the railway as far as possible. It should link into other existing rights of way. It will benefit locals on the Island and be a tourist asset and will be an enabler to the West Wight area. In principal landowners will be compensated for land taken up by the track at a flat rate per acre, which would be the same for all on the route (that is there was no special negotiation).

Multi-use for walkers, cyclists, and horse riders was important. To bring about co-operation from landowners there have had to be trade-off agreements to extinguish some rights-of-way. Some of these are north-south footpaths exchanged for the east-west multi-use route. The Ramblers Association has been consulted and a revision adopted which they support. Other groups including cyclists, equestrians and the Open Spaces Society have been consulted. The route starts at Freshwater Bay and ends at Gunville Greenway. He sees it as a first step to becoming part of the National Cycle Network linking to the Red Squirrel Trail and more.

The eleven landowners who are involved are now in agreement with the heads of terms proposals which Graham will present to the IWC on Tuesday 22 June. Subject to agreement by councillors and further negotiations with landowners the land dedications will be signed and 15% deposit will then be paid to landowners. Once the scheme is in place the dedication agreements will be finalised and 85% balance paid.

The route is 21km in total with existing rights-of-way sections, new sections, as well as some quiet road sections which have been considered and approved by Island Roads with some signage added. There are 9248m of new bridleway, 562m new footpath and about 4.9km of quiet roads. About 4700m of footpaths are likely to be removed. About 5km of new hedgerow will be created which is a green bonus he is pleased with. The cost budget is £980k in total including hopefully some matched funding by central government. The IWC budget is £400k in 2021-22, and Graham hopes that the IWC will prioritise the scheme over other walking & cycling schemes. It will be subject to a single planning application, to be submitted shortly, in time for the September planning committee. All route options and compromises have been considered exhaustively and he asks people to accept that the best possible route has been chosen.

Graham is prepared for criticism of the expenditure and will prepare a statement of the value to the Isle of Wight Community arising from the scheme. (MWa and TT have provided some documentation since the meeting) He believes from his long experience on the Island that this the best opportunity to provide a West Wight route and he asks that CycleWight is supportive. He added that he must present it to the IWC the details of the route before he is able to release these to us. Graham will be receptive to feedback and will seek our point of view regarding needs and wishes of cyclists in the design.

TT said that, Jersey for example, has green roads with a 20mph limit, whereas the quiet road sections are in fact 60mph limit roads (he gave examples). GB acknowledged this, but it is a

matter for the politicians. Island Roads have completed a report about the on-road sections. TT has asked for CW to see the report. GB said he would have to seek permission. His task is to present the project to officers of the Council. He hoped work could be completed by March 2023 if possible.

GW welcomed the plans as a West Wight route has been a long term dream. He asked about the nature of the track proposed. GB said there would be a chalk base with planing on top – not tarmac. The track width would be 3m with a 1m buffer either side, so that a 5m strip of land would be dedicated in the arrangements. An exception to this is at Afton Marsh North which would not be available for horse riding because Natural England consider inappropriate, The track width here will narrower and will take account of the nature reserve.

TT asked about provision of hedgerow instead of fence – or as well as fence when the hedgerow is in the 1m buffer. GB acknowledged that this is possible. He said that arable farmers wanted hedges and livestock farmers wanted fences. Advice has been taken from IWC/ROW who will be responsible for maintenance and hedge cutting for 9km of new rights-of-way. He added that Darrel Clarke has provided advice and has been brilliant.

MR asked if the completed route will be bridleway. GB said yes except for the Afton Marsh North section where horse riding will not be permitted on the nature reserve. TT noted that the Newport Cowes track was a right-of way on foot and a permissive cycle track, which precluded horse riding.

TT asked about support from businesses. Off The Rails at Yarmouth is highly successful as a destination in its own right, and he is sure there will be support to come from other businesses. GB said 15 accommodation providers and 12 hospitality businesses had been identified on the route. He would like to see money allocated to support business ventures on the back of the scheme. They are keen to build in adaptations at the design stage if notified of requirements.

GB said the next step is an information campaign, which would involve CycleWight. A suitable name could be chosen by public vote. We all have a responsibility to get the design right and input from CycleWight for the design is part of this – perhaps a walk over the proposed route could be arranged. He really does not want to re-open discussion on the route as it is not perfect but is the best that can be achieved in given circumstances. He would get real pleasure from seeing jobs created.

Many thanks to Graham for the brilliant presentation.

2. Cycle track network - Rookley link

As noted in previous minutes a link from Rookley to the Newport - Sandown track has been suggested by local resident Warren Payne. The existing A37 bridleway needs to be engineered to make an all-weather track. Graham Biss will meet the land manager on site next week – she has been very positive. Bob Seely MP is very supportive.

3. Newport – Sandown: Track Inspection

CycleWight members Mick Watts and Pete Dyer met IWC Highways Inspector Ian Dawson on 12 May at Blackwater and walked to Merstone & towards Hurringford. The objective was to understand the role of the IWC Highways inspectors in monitoring the cycle track and the work of Island Roads to fulfil their contract. Mick Watts has produced a Visit Report which has been circulated to the committee for this meeting. AL will forward this report to Councillor Paul Fuller chair of the Local Access Forum.

MW made the point that the inspectors are responsible for many other highways along with the cycle track. The inspector was focused in particular on safety issues. During the inspection cyclists were seen to be at risk due to poor surfaces and flooding at the Blackwater section. MW

said he hopes to build a relationship with the inspectors and a better understanding of the difference between maintenance and upgrade which would require further funding.

Pete Dyer has made a follow-up report, also circulated to the committee, which address our understanding of the IWC-Island Roads interaction and the way forward in terms of planned CycleWight meeting with IWC contract managers (see previous minutes).

Matt Whitaker said it is a great report. He noted (link to article): <https://onthewight.com/payments-to-island-roads-withheld-as-milestone-14-over-a-year-late/> which suggests Highways PFI contract included “upgrading of cyclepaths” and implied this had been carried out. This appears to contradict what CycleWight are being told about maintenance, and needs to be resolved in our communications with the IWC.

Cllr Phil Jordan is the new cabinet member for Transport & Infrastructure. We should circulate to him and to new councillors the report along with our demand that the poor condition of certain parts of the tracks are improved.

4. Roles within Cyclewight committee

TT suggested that this needs to be reviewed and we will address this at the next meeting

5. Strava Metro app– date for meeting with IWC

Matt Whittaker, George Wilks, TT to meet next week to discuss.

6. Bells

AL & VGL gave out bells on Cowes sea front on Sunday. We also gave out with Val's round Cowes & cross Cowes maps & other maps which worked quite well in attracting interested. We will do further events, perhaps on the Cowes end of the cycle track.

7. IWBURG scheme.

IWC Rail reopening study stakeholder consultation – IWBURG response”. This suggests a dedicated west bound bus route parallel to Fairlee Road, running from the area where there are solar panels into Halberry Lane. (see CW20210427.pdf)

AL thinks that the old rail alignment past Little Fairlee Farm is more likely to happen on the back of a bus and cycle route than just as cycle access.

The Emergency Active Travel Fund scheme at Fairlee Road upgrades the section from Halberry Lane as far as footpath N118, where it leads cyclists onto the Fairlee Road footway. Lee Matthews has said he hopes further funding will follow for more route improvements (see CW20210204.pdf). AL will do more research & see what has happened on the ground with the EATF. He hopes to go there in next couple of days

There was a general consensus that this could be of benefit to cyclists.

8. AoB

Wider for the Rider banner to be displayed at the roadside by Pedallers ***GW***

For the website we should include camping suitable for cyclists: Camp Wight, Ningwood Hill, Yarmouth PO41 0XP. Kingston Smallholding, 4 Bucks Cottages PO30 3LP 01983 551527 (may not be ready?).

MR said there is a consultation on Ryde Interchange for 6 weeks starting soon. The current proposal is for the strip of land known as the rose garden to become footway, and for a 2.7m

cycleway alongside. The car parking on the highway is retained. *Post-Meeting Note:*
<https://onthewight.com/ryde-interchange-were-out-of-time-to-change-road-design-says-cabinet-member/>

MR is leading preparation of an LCWIP for Ryde area and is inviting interested parties to join.

GW said new IoW councillors should be contacted on behalf of CycleWight. TT has written to all of them but an event linked to the use of Strava data may be the way forward.

MWh is working with Will Ainslie & Martin Gibson on an electric cargo bike scheme for Cowes. Volunteers to ride these round Cowes will be wanted. They will hear on 23 June if money has been approved.

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9. Next meeting

Wednesday 21 July 1830 at Merstone Station? Or at TT's if weather not suitable?