

CYCLE WINCHESTER

CHAIR'S REPORT, FEBRUARY 2026

Preamble

This is my fourth (and final) chair's report since Cycle Winchester organised itself into an unincorporated association.

Back in 2022 we saw the benefit of having our own bank account, of creating a membership scheme that allowed people to support us both directly and indirectly, and of being able to bid for grants. We also believed it would accord us credibility in our dealings with other organisations as happened for example when Cycle Winchester was officially recognised as a 'interested party' during the M3/J9 examination in 2023.

At the time we had some slight concerns that formalising our operations in such a way would divert energy and attention away from core business and towards the mechanics of our operation. I don't think any of us would reverse that decision now.

Later in this meeting we will be voting on a further progression - registering as a charitable organisation. Once again, I'm sure there will be reservations, but I hope after discussion members will feel confident about the benefits that will accrue and that this will be another step forward that we won't want to reverse.

The Year in Numbers

Website unique visitors in the calendar year: 11,000

Website articles: 13

Newsletters: 3

Facebook page followers 905 (+18%)

Instagram followers 1089 (+47%)

Members: 136 (+15%)

Mailing list subscribers: 485 (+8%)

It's always good to see figures going in the right direction, particular on Instagram. There's a continued ambition to increase our web publishing and make newsletters more regular.

A harder number to quantify is X – the number of hours spent by core team members working towards our vision of a Winchester that is Better By Bike. It definitely runs into four figures.

But trying to easily encapsulate what those hours represent is not so easy.

Over five previous reports I've tried to split our activities into two distinct parts as below.

Sep '20	Status Report	<i>direct campaigning</i>	<i>public engagement</i>
Jan '22	Operating Report	<i>direct campaigning</i>	<i>indirect campaigning</i>
Feb '23	Chair's Report	<i>schemes & consultations</i>	<i>activities to keep cycling high on the agenda</i>
Feb '24	Chair's Report	<i>schemes & consultations</i>	<i>Ideas we hope will advance our aim</i>
Feb '25	Chair's Report	<i>better cycling infrastructure</i>	<i>promoting cycling as a better option</i>

Recent thoughts about how we organise ourselves brought up a new divide: *advocacy* and *engagement*. I think we all realised this doesn't quite do the trick either but it'll serve the purposes of this report until we find a better fit.

ADVOCACY

This means advocating for better cycling provision at all levels:

- over-arching plans eg relevant LCWIPs
- individual schemes and infrastructure projects
- planning policy and guidance, planning applications and enforcement.

Reasons to be cheerful

One A couple of years ago Cycle Winchester had developed a good working relationship with the relevant authorities, had been accorded a high degree of trust and given regular access and updates to information and designs. In recent times the access and information-sharing has gone into reverse. A particular concern is committing an enormous amount of time working on early designs only for them to emerge at short notice much further down the line with many of the limitations we've highlighted ignored but with little time or opportunity to be amended. So, it is good to report that we recently had a very positive meeting with relevant officers at HCC who once again seem to have a fully-staffed department and have set in place a regular three-monthly meeting with CW which includes WCC representation.

Two Some infrastructure improvements have happened ... not always quite to our liking but close enough and certainly improvements to be celebrated.

- a parallel crossing on Worthy Road and related changes
- surfacing under the railway bridge at Kings Barton
- Advanced Stop Lines/Lights on City Road (still awaiting early release ...)
- cycling now allowed on Middle Brook Street between Friarsgate and Silver Hill
- a traffic filter on Hyde Church Lane

Three We've tended to regard this side of our activities as essentially reactive: we aren't the highway authority, have no engineering expertise and we certainly aren't the fund holders.

However there has been a move towards CW being more proactive.

- the best example is pushing our vision of the Barton Line as a catalyst for change. [A short presentation will follow after the break]
- we are currently investigating a bid to the National Highways Community Legacy Fund to surface a section of the Black Path between Alresford Road and Tesco.
- we have recently completed an audit of the NCN23 between City Bridge and Five Bridges Lane and will be looking at ways to get support for a series of changes that will we believe improve certain sections of the route for all users and also quietly reassert the rights of cyclists, who are often made to feel a nuisance even though it is part of the National Cycle Network.
- we are trying to re-energise the long-standing issue of a cycle link between North Walls and Park Avenue through the university site. Typical of many situations, the estates department say it is too early to be discussing cycling because things are still at a very high-level conceptual stage. Yet the very first key design principle reads: *improving access to and from the site for pedestrians and vehicles* ie it has no mention of cyclists and no thought of access through the site.

Other advocacy work

The list below - which isn't intended to be comprehensive - shows some of the main schemes where we have committed time.

- M3/J9, including temporary diversions and Cart and Horses junction
- Parchment Street contraflow
- Romsey Road crossing
- Olivers Battery/Badger Farm Road junction
- Middle Brook Street crossing
- St Cross Road shared crossing at Garnier Road
- Station Approach
- South Wonston to Winchester / Andover Road

In some cases, the main input was in a previous year - this year has been about chasing updates, pushing for action, follow-up site meetings, monitoring/reviewing developments: examples would include Parchment Street contraflow and Romsey Road crossing.

Other bigger schemes (eg Sir John Moore Barracks, Bushfield Camp) are on a watching brief with occasional interventions or in some cases (Station Approach) urgent responses when new plans re-emerge with virtually all previous cycling input seemingly forgotten.

South Wonston to Winchester cycle link sees a continuing battle to try and ensure this becomes a utility cycle route, useable all year round on *all* types of bike.

Separately Cycle Winchester has submitted responses to consultations on:

- City Focus LCWIP
(CW concerns were later discussed at the HCC Decision Day meeting)
- Community Governance Review
- Integrated National Transport Strategy
- South Downs National Park Draft Active Travel Network Plan
(we then had a follow-up meeting with SDNP to share our ideas in more detail).

ENGAGEMENT

This means everything else ...

- getting more people cycling
- supporting those who do cycle
- helping build a cycling community

Reasons to be cheerful

One Mass Ride 8 had record numbers last time and a new improved approach to navigating the one-way system using temporary road closures and a trailing vehicle that really improved the cohesion of the ride.

We hope Mass Ride 9 will be bigger and better!

We are planning some fine-tuning to the road closures and awaiting approval for that.

And although our youngest cyclists are usually extremely capable on the rides into town, for those who might need additional rests on the way we have plans for an additional route into town which will have less traffic and more flexibility with time and speed .. and will promote what we have called 'the Barton Line'.

There should be more details on our website in the next week or two.

[A short presentation will follow after the break]

Two Bike buses in the city are growing ... in number and numbers.

It is very exciting to watch things grow: young cyclists are cyclists for life.

Hopefully other parents will be inspired to set up something similar at their own school.

Cycle Winchester and the Bike Bus community more widely can offer all the advice, support and encouragement needed.

[A short presentation will follow after the break]

Three We are increasing our visibility and developing connections with more allied groups.

This year we have attended

- Winchester Workplace Travel Network
- Winchester Greener Schools Forum
- Bike Bus Summit
- Greener Futures Partnership

had stalls at

- Green Fair
- Hat Fair

and have good contact and information sharing with

- local groups including WinACC, Green Party, FoE, Winchester Walking Strategy Group, 20's Plenty, SLOWeR
- wider groups including Cycle Hants, CUK Cycling Advocacy Network, Transport Action Network.

Other engagement work

People Who Cycle series

A new addition after a hiatus - Mary and Becki's story, written and just about to be published. The aim is to represent some of the people who cycle around our city and demonstrate they are far from the stereotypical cyclists envisioned by angry letter writers in the Hampshire Chronicle!

Annual Cycle Census

A reason not to be cheerful: our cycle census showed zero increase in the overall numbers of rush-hour cyclists since we began counting in 2022. Nationally it's hard to find direct comparisons and there's certainly a very mixed picture but increased numbers are unsurprisingly correlated to investment in schemes and success seems to happen where authorities say *this is what we're going to do* rather than *this is what we'd like to do*. That isn't trampling over democracy because generally there seems to be a quiet approval for such change but opposition that is very vocal.

Open Meetings

We've had two further open meetings this year.

'Let's Get Cycling' was about sharing ways we can help people into cycling eg training, taster rides, bike hire, buddy schemes, bike workshops, route maps and so on.

'Cycling and the Mayor' was a look forward to upcoming local government reorganisation and the election of mayors - how can we organise as a regional voice for cycling (and active travel more generally) and what should our asks be in the mayoral election process. We were supported by a presentation from Duncan Dollimore, from Cycling UK but then slightly thwarted by an announcement the following day that the elections had been postponed. Looking positively we see this as more time for all of us to get our act together. [A short presentation will follow after the break by Hampshire Climate Action Network (HCAN)]

Cycle Parking/Thefts

We continue to monitor the level and location of bike thefts across the city and advocate for more parking and more secure arrangements. We have done what we can to get movement towards a solution around the trees and bike parking impasse at Winchester Railway Station, including recent interventions from our MP.

hello@cyclewinchester.org.uk

Our contact email regularly gets enquiries.

Questions might include:

- can you suggest a good route for cycling from A to B?
- I've been injured in a bike accident, what should I do?
- where can my child's school find advice on cycle parking?

I think the depth and care in responses given is generally something we should be proud of.

Routes

Providing information about local cycle routes is very important especially for new cyclists and newcomers to the city. Although there are lots of apps around we often discuss what more we can do. An attempt to seed a bottom-up approach with example routes to and from Badger Farm has not taken off. We have recently initiated a series of cycling 'short-cuts'.

THANKS

Members

With so many competing demands for attention (and money) I'd like to thank our members for their support. We appreciate it and don't want to take it for granted. Your support is good for our morale and our credibility. And I won't pre-empt the Treasurer's report but your subscription has put us on a secure financial footing.

We think membership is a good deal, that we do good work and use your money wisely. But we can and will aim to do better in keeping you informed and in touch.

Core Group

It has been rewarding and almost always enjoyable (!) to chair a group with such a mix of experience, expertise, creativity and enthusiasm. It would be difficult to start naming names, someone would get missed – I think we all appreciate who contributes what.

Thank you everyone for all you do on behalf of cycling and cyclists in the city but a particular thanks to my fellow officers - Mike Caldwell, Treasurer and Anne Forder, Secretary - for taking on necessary responsibilities and fulfilling them calmly and effectively.

David, Rob, Emma

A special thanks to the Mass Ride team of 2020. We joined the core group together back then and without their support, direct and indirect, I probably wouldn't still be here now.

LOOKING FORWARD

Separate to moving our formal structure to a charitable status we have also been looking at how we function as a group, especially in the light of a vacant chair's position.

Our core team has new energy, ideas and capacity.

Over the next three or four months we are hoping to evolve so that ...

- roles and responsibilities are more distributed within the group
- we are more organised and efficient in our meetings, communication (internal and external), information sharing and record-keeping.

I'd like to wish all the best to those in the group now steering us through the changes ahead. However it works out, I know Cycle Winchester will be in good hands and continuing its great work in both Advocacy and Engagement.

John Arthur
Chair