

Wakefield District Cycle Forum

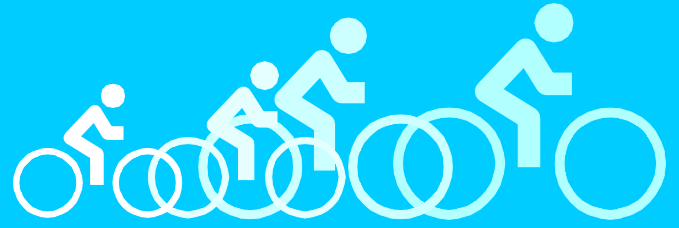
We are publishing this special newsletter at a time when cycling is being recognised by public authorities as an important part of future transport and health policy.

The newsletter outlines some of the work Wakefield District Cycle Forum (WDCF) has done over the years to improve the cycle infrastructure in the district. Many of the improvements for which WDCF has been responsible are now taken for granted by the increasing number of people making use of our cycle path network. Hopefully, this newsletter will show the importance of the infrastructure work of WDCF.

As you will also read, we have been facing difficulties due to the lack of response from the Highways and Public Rights of Way departments in the council although a recent Skype meeting with WMDC has raised hopes that actions will be progressed. The improvement of infrastructure friendly to cycling is not possible without the Council's cooperation.

We are therefore asking our members to show support for our infrastructure work by emailing the Council Highways/PROW departments and/or your Councillors urging them to take a more positive approach to the improvement of cycle infrastructure in the district.





Looking back and forward too

Most people come across Wakefield District Cycle Forum through either its guided rides or at one of the local events where we set up a circuit for younger riders to test their skills. Alternatively, they pick up a brochure in their local library or cycle shop or see a group out on a ride or refreshing themselves at the café stop. There is another side to the forum, however. Not just mending paths and scything back errant vegetation. Wakefield District Cycle Forum plans, promotes and campaigns for new or improved routes and seeks to link existing routes together to make seamless trails.

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Looking Back

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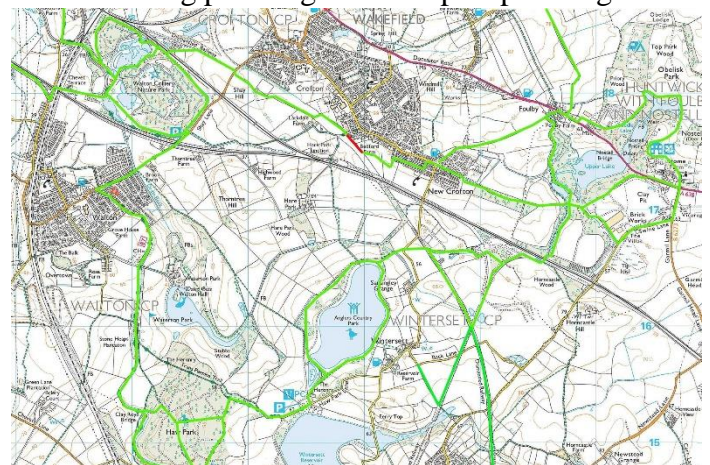
As we are not leading rides at present, Sandy Clark, having polished his bike until it gleams, has produced the following magnificent article on the history of Wakefield District Cycle Forum, outlining our achievements over the years, our plans for the future and the stumbling blocks along the way. Hang up your helmet, sit back and enjoy.

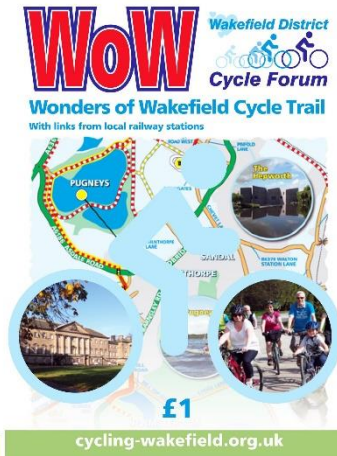
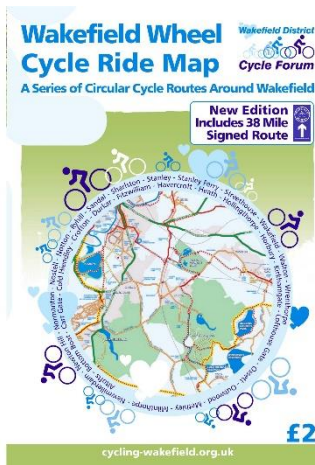
Reflections on Wakefield District Cycle Forum (WDCF) - Infrastructure Development -

In the Beginning

When WDCF was created in 2008, in response to the axing of Wakefield Council's Healthy Transport Team, improving the transport infrastructure for cyclist was one of its central aims. In the beginning it was expected that this would be achieved by liaising with Wakefield Council and influencing planning and transport planning.

At an early stage it was decided that a core strategy in achieving this aim should be building paths which would fill in 'missing links' with the aim of creating a connected network of traffic-free paths in the district. The first success in this strategy was the agreement of Nostell Estates to the network of footpaths on their land being designated as permissive brideways. This was also the first example of the value of persistence. It took many approaches and much persuasion by our vice-chair, David Keighley, before this agreement was forthcoming. The network in Nostell estate, which many cyclists now enjoy and take for granted, became central to a much wider network of traffic-free paths in the district.

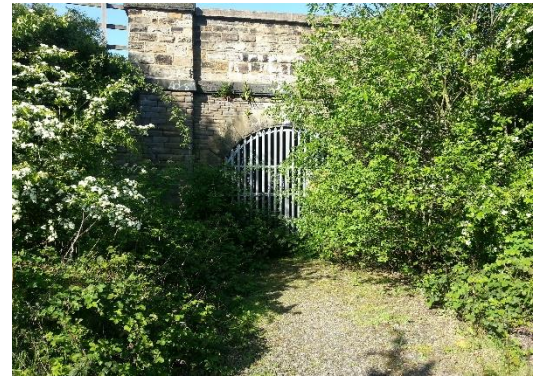




David Keighley's second brainchild, which was dependent on this network being developed, was the Wakefield Wheel, or the Wheel to its friends, soon to be followed by the Wonders of Wakefield, known affectionately as the WoW. WDCF developed, acquired funding, and printed the maps of these trails and volunteers mapped out the positioning, placing and maintenance of signs on the route. These two popular cycle trails are not only well used by cyclists in the district but attract cyclists from far and wide who enjoy the experience of a day out around the best that Wakefield can offer.

Do It Yourself

By 2010, WDCF realised that, although the Council had a crucial role in developing infrastructure, if it was to fully realise its ambition to develop a traffic-free cycle path network it could no longer depend totally on council construction of paths. As a result, WDCF became directly active in improving and extending the network. The first venture into this 'direct action' was to fill in the 'missing link' between Crofton and Walton Colliery Nature Park, completing a traffic-free link (almost) between Crofton and Sandal and Agbrigg station and removing the need to use the busy Shay Lane. This Council project had stalled when Yorkshire Water (YW) objected to the use of the lane leading to their water works. In 2010 WDCF approached YW, without success, but after persistent requests and a letter writing campaign by our members YW eventually agree to meet, in October 2012, with WDCF and Wakefield Council the result of which was the withdrawal of their objection.

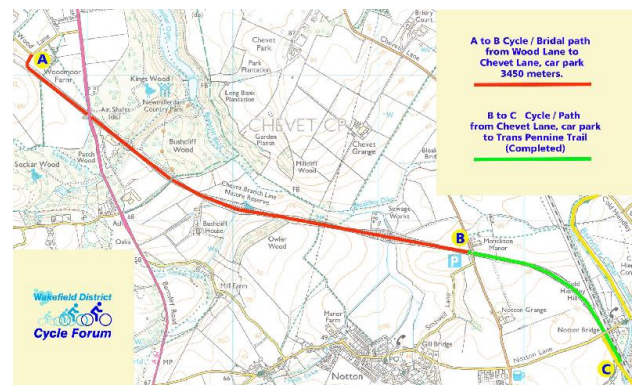


Meanwhile WDCF were approaching Network Rail (NR) to seek the removal of gates which NR had erected, and which blocked the entrance to the park in Walton. Again, it took almost two years of persistence, and the help of local MP, Jon Trickett, before NR agreed to meet WDCF and Council officers and agree to the removal of the gates, which the Council duly did. The path is now well used by walkers and cyclists and forms part of the WoW.

Great Leap Forward

While we were completing the final stages of the Crofton/Walton campaign, in mid-2012, Natural England (NE) announced a grant project for Paths for Communities (P4C) which fitted perfectly with the largest of our 'missing-link' ambitions. This was a 5-kilometre path, on the disused Chevet Branch Line railway, linking the Trans Pennine Way (TPT) at Old Royston with Newmillerdam and Wood Lane in Chapelthorpe.

WDCF decided, despite having no experience in this kind of project, to have a go at project-managing the construction of the path. Some of the land was owned by Wakefield Council, who joined the project as partners and completed the official designation of the path as a bridleway. But there were complications with two of the three other landowners who needed to be brought on board. Over the 18 months or so that it took to complete the project many issues had to be overcome with landowners, parish council and the grant givers. The new path was completed at the end of 2013, officially opened in March 2014, is an integral part of both the Wheel and WoW, and serves the district well as an amazing oasis of accessible countryside on the edge of the City.



The Chevet Branch Line probably remains the largest project yet undertaken by WDCF. The time it took, the length of the finished path and the cost of around £100,000 make it a truly amazing achievement.

Following this success WDCF has taken on smaller projects including surfacing new all-weather paths in the Nostell Estate. For these we acquired the landowner's consent, leased the land, raised the funds and project managed the construction. A shorter and less expensive, around £24,000, path than the Chevet Branch Line, but again a well-used path which by-passes the previous muddy path and improves the accessibility of the Wheel and WoW, and indeed the whole network.

A reflection on WDCF work to improve cycling infrastructure would not be complete if it was not to mention the work of our workgroup. Building up over a number of years, it has added to, maintained and improved the traffic-free paths in the district. A group of around a dozen volunteer. Most turn out on two days of each month cutting back, filling in and generally making cycling a more enjoyable experience throughout our network.

Influencing others

The improvements in cycle infrastructure for which WDCF can take credit are not just those we have constructed directly. We have also influenced the council and other partners in their attitudes to cycling and cyclists.

Our partnership with the National Trust (NT) at Nostell, for example, led to a year long programme of rides and a summer long programme of events centred around Nostell. As a result, Nostell has become synonymous with cycling, welcoming cyclists in a way that would not have been witnessed before we developed that partnership. How far the embracing of cycling has gone at Nostell is illustrated by the dedicated cycle paths/trail within the NT's grounds.

The completion of the Castleford to Wakefield Greenway may not have happened without more than a decade of campaigning by WDCF. Many in Wakefield Council were not receptive to this project and wanted to direct City Connect, who headed up the project, towards other schemes. The popularity of the new route has vindicated WDCF persistence.

And it was the WDCF workgroup who organised and provided the labour to lay the final link at the Wakefield end of the route, with Wakefield Council supplying and delivering materials and machinery.



Where to now?

The relationship between WDCF and Wakefield Council has not always been a smooth one. At times in the past it has almost broken down completely as WDCF questioned whether the effort it was putting into the development of project was wasted due to council inaction. WDCF has proposed a series of projects to add to and improve the cycle network in the district over the next year and more but the response from the council to these proposals has been overwhelmingly negative. At a time when the benefit of increasing the number of people cycling is recognised more widely than ever, we hope some progress can at last be made.

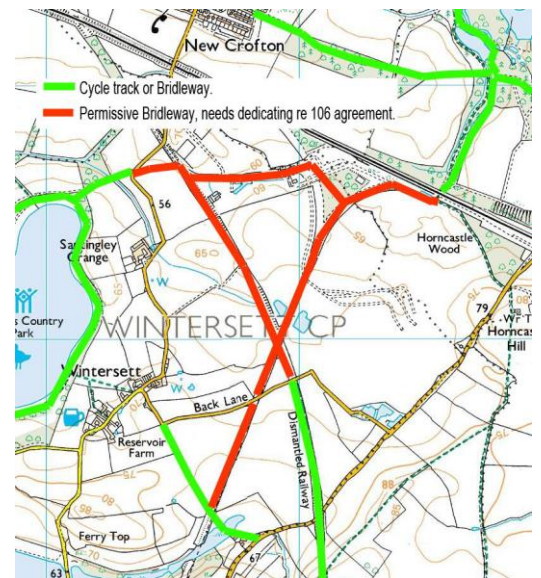
The examples below illustrate the reason for our frustration



Moorhouse site Crofton

This is the site of an old open cast mine south of Crofton. Planning permission for the mine included a commitment to install bridlevays on the site when extraction was completed (see map). To date the council has not designated the paths and they remain 'permissive'. The site is now under the ownership of Metcalfe farms and the owner is refusing to cooperate on the construction of the bridlevays.

In early 2017 WDCF offered to pay for and project manage the construction of an all-weather surface on part of the proposed bridlevays. After two meetings with Mr. Metcalfe, one attended by a council officer from Public Rights of Way (PROW), the council wrote to him outlining the bridlevay agreements. WDCF have continued to request an update from the council on the progress being made on this proposed project with no success, in fact with many emails going unanswered. Finally, in February 2020, we were informed that a PROW officer had met with Mr. Metcalfe. We were not told the outcome of the meeting. We have been informed that the matter was referred to the council legal department, but it would seem they have not acted on the issue.



Not only has Mr. Metcalfe refused to cooperate but has ploughed up one of the fields, adjacent to Santingley Lane between Wintersett and Crofton, which is part of the proposed bridlevay network making this path, part of the Wheel and WoW, impassable for most of the year. WDCF proposals to overcome this issue for the future seem to have been ignored.

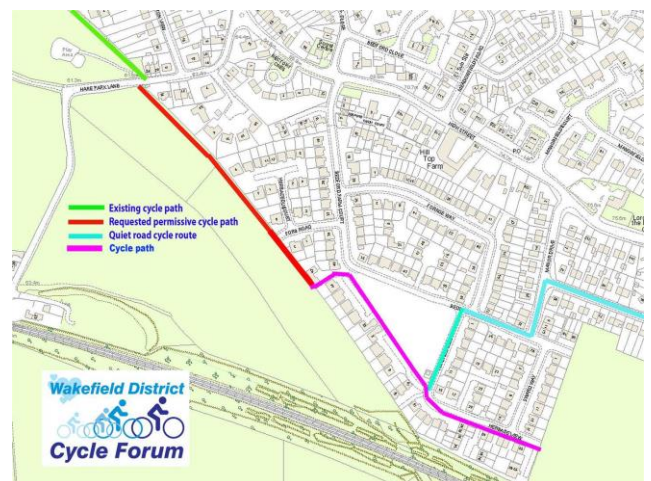
This project cannot be progressed without council action. Why are they so inactive on this issue? The council has recently reported that efforts by their Public Rights of Way Team to get the landowner to enter into the creation agreement have been unsuccessful. As a result the undertaking within

the S106 agreement for the dedication of the bridlevays at Santingley has been passed to their Legal Services and Planning Enforcement but unfortunately there is no progress to date. We await developments.

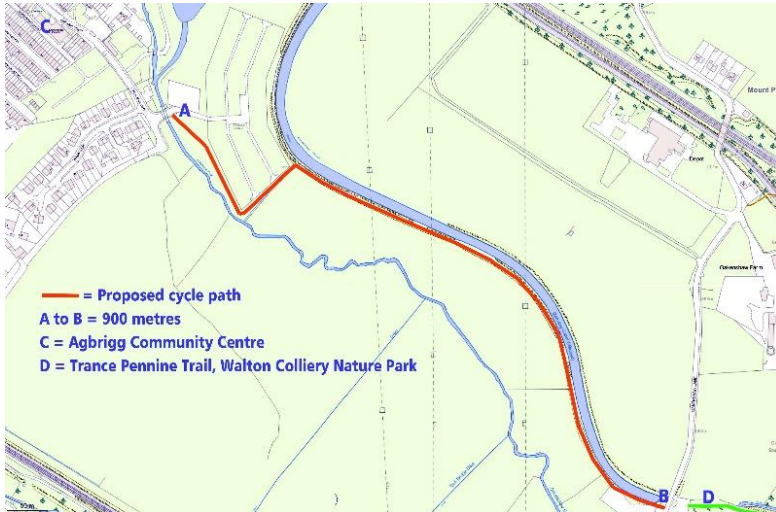
Cycle path Crofton

An opportunity has arisen to extend the traffic-free cycle route between Crofton and Sandal and Agbrigg station and link it into a new housing estate, Bedford Farm Estate. This would need a new path along a field edge from the track through the park in Crofton into the housing, approx. 150 metres (see map). WDCF contacted the developers who own the field and they have agreed to the creation of a foot/cycle path.

The council reaction to this proposal has been very negative, listing all the issues to be overcome and the time needed to overcome them without any explanation as to why these issues should cause difficulties or why it should take so long. This is despite the fact that again WDCF has acquired landowner consent, offered to project manage the surfacing of the path and find funding for it. Wakefield Council have at last asked for details of the landowner involved and we very much hope this means some progress can be made.



Agbrigg to Walton Park Path



WDCF have proposed the upgrading and surfacing of an existing path from Agbrigg to Oakenshaw Road to link into the cycle paths in Walton Colliery Nature Park and the Network beyond. The project has the support of the local community and WDCF has secured funding for the project. Initially the council Highways Department were on board with this project but have now decided there are some safety issue with the path. Rather than address the safety issues and solve any problems, council officers were proposing simply to determine that the path is not suitable for cyclists. They have recently agreed to investigate the cost of a safety audit and of removing a large tree which creates a pinch point on the path.

Councillor Denise Jeffrey, Leader of Wakefield Council, did appear to be prepared to listen when proposals were put for making cycling safer in the pandemic and ideas were passed on to local councillors but WDCF is not aware of any effective action resulting.

An article in the Pontefract and Castleford Express of the 11th June 2020 revealed that over the next three years Wakefield Council plans to invest over £25m in active and sustainable travel. What could be more active and sustainable than cycling? Apparently proposed plans include improving the A61 corridor with better cycle lanes. The cabinet member for planning and highways, Councillor Matthew Morley is on record as saying, ‘I welcome this major investment which will create many great opportunities to improve public transport and to enhance cycling and walking routes in the region.’

As outlined above, WDCF has put forward straightforward proposals that could be acted on speedily to produce some quick results at marginal expense to the council taxpayer. We very much hope to see some swift action.

Meetings continue

Despite the restrictions imposed by the Covid 19 regulations, strategy meetings continue. This picture shows four of the five members appropriately socially distanced, who held a meeting recently behind the bike shed at Nostell. It was pouring down, but fortunately there was an old awning which kept off most of the rain. The fifth member of the team, who won't take selfies on principle, took the photo which does, more importantly, include his bike.

If you would like to be more involved, look out for our workdays on facebook. All you need is the ability to wield a pick or shovel but you would be doubly welcome if you have a vehicle with a towbar

Come along to our AGM, on a date yet to be fixed, to find out how you can help improve cycling provision in this area of Yorkshire and build on the foundations so ably laid.

