



Wheelrights

the Swansea Bay cycle campaign group



Newsletter No. 67 Spring 2024

www.wheelrights.org.uk

Cyclists need access to the Countryside.



As a member of the Local Access Forum (LAF) I have been invited to comment on Swansea's draft Countryside Access Plan (CAP). You've guessed it: it's all about access to the countryside for walkers and horse riders, there's little in it for cyclists. We have until the end of March to comment on it and I trust that *Wheelrights* will not be alone in pressing for it to include plans for better cycle access.

The photo illustrates this need. Taken in May 2022 it shows bluebells in Park Woods on the Peninsula when they were at their best. I hopped on my bike to cycle the four miles from my Pennard home to see them. This is an example of a trip where it's too far to walk and a bike offers an alternative to the car.

There are many other places, whether it be a beach, a castle, a café, or simply the starting point for a walk, where getting there by bike makes complete sense. This is a form of active travel, different in that it applies to tourists as well as to locals.

We will be asking for a revised CAP to include the cycle network *Wheelrights* propose for the Peninsula. (see the "Rural Routes" section on the "Routes page" of our website.)

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Copy deadline

Material for the next issue should be sent to David Naylor by mid May. (Email: david@davidjnaylor.plus.com)

This issue

We start with an update on the 'Missing Link'.

This is followed by the latest on the Uplands (Walter Road to Sketty) Active Travel plan.

Next an article about our website, followed by one which would adapt the so called 'new website' to apply to a new 'Movement'

On p.6 Bill Gannon has the answer to this wet weather. I then summarise CUK's position on cycle helmets; and, finally, a taster for this year's Swansea and Gower Cycling Festival.

David Naylor

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For their contact details visit:

www.wheelrights.org.uk/aboutus

The Missing Link: an update.

I last reported on the 'Missing Link' in the Spring 2023 Newsletter (Issue 64, p.3). I now update members on where the Local Authority (LA) are with it, namely the bit missing on the Shared Use Path (SUP) along the B4295 between Penclawdd and Gowerton. The photo shows it.

Last November stakeholders and interested parties attended a MS Teams meeting with a LA appointed consultant, Mott MacDonald (MM), to discuss the need and feasibility of constructing a much needed safe route for non-motorised travel between the two villages. MM proposed five possible routes to cover the missing 1.1 km of SUP. Those present and during subsequent discussions were able to add our two pennies worth of supporting arguments.

Forward to 1st February 2024 and MM's findings were that there is indeed a valid case for the construction of our Missing Link SUP, and of the five possible routes they would be proposing the original route on the north (estuary) side of the road along the existing (inadequate) footpath. Planning permission for this had been obtained in 2006, thus confirming that Sustrans' original preferred route was the way to go. Who would have thought of that?

The next stage in the WelTAG process of SUP approval is for MM to provide a written proposal to the LA that will suggest that they apply for funding from the Welsh Assembly (WA) to enable a topographical survey to be carried out during the 2024/25 financial year. On completion of this study the LA should seek further funding from the WA to implement the project during 2025/6. We are currently awaiting the said report.

So, a mighty thank you to all of you who are supporting our mission. Rest assured that we are continuing to bang the drum and will keep rolling our 'squeaky wheel of need' in-front of our local councillors, MPs and anyone else who may help us to get the job done.

Please help to keep the 'The Missing Link' campaign ticking over and view the updates from Joe Muldoon on the petition, the link to which is given in the 'Missing Link' section in <https://www.wheelrights.org.uk/campaigns.htm>. Alternatively if you have a QR code reader app on your smart phone, please scan this code and add your name.

If you are on facebook visit: <https://www.facebook.com/northgoweraccesspath> or for more information email: northgoweraccesspath@gmail.com.



Mark Divers.
(On behalf of the NGAP group)

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Uplands: Active Travel plan

Ever since the Kingsway was upgraded to its present more cycle and pedestrian friendly form the need for such provision along and beyond Walter Road has become ever more apparent. It appears that the Council have listened to advice as they have come up with a plan which at least *Wheelrights* support. Here I describe the key features.

The plan involves the A4118 from De-la-Bèche Road in the west to Page Street in the east. A 3m wide two-way dedicated cycle track is proposed for the south side of the road for the full (2km) length. It will be between the carriageway and the footway. There will be parking adjacent to the track and also on the north side of the road. The carriageway is to be narrowed to 6m; necessary to provide space for the (essentially unchanged) footways, the cycle track and parking. This narrowing has advantages as I'll explain below.

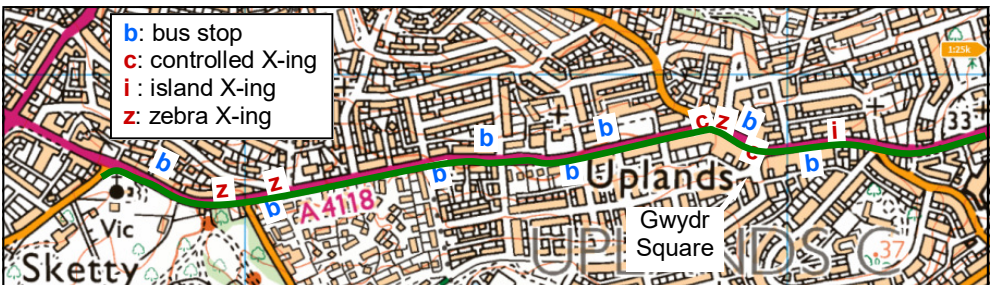
Details of the plans are available on the internet. (Search "Walter Road, Active Travel".) They are shown on three sheets. The map below covers the westerly two. The green line indicates the cycle track; bus stops and crossings are also shown. These are mainly in their present positions, but the bus stops will be changed to become "islands", located between the cycle track and the carriageway. Changes to the crossings range from altering them from controlled to zebra and vice versa, and to putting them on raised tables. See the Council's plans for the detail.

An excellent feature of the plans is the dedicated cycle track. It ticks (nearly) all the boxes. There is a general fall from west to east so that the big advantage of the track being on the south side is that slower (uphill) westbound cyclists do not hold up traffic. Narrowing the carriageway makes it safer for faster eastbound cyclists who use the road. (If you don't know why, see my article on Mayals Road in the Autumn 2021 issue of this Newsletter.) Being two-way, less confident eastbound cyclists can use the cycle track. Narrowing also shortens the crossing distance, allowing single stage crossings without a central island. And, of course, the track being just for cyclists the potential conflict of SUPs is avoided.

So what's not to like? There seems to be minimal, if any, provision for cyclists to cross the road. A solution would be to make at least some of the zebras parallel crossings. Another issue is the danger of 'dooring'. Given that there is not space to add a dooring zone between the parking bays and the cycle track a suggestion I have put to the Council is that they paint a hatched strip, maybe labelled "dooring zone", on the track alongside the bays.

Will these plans be implemented? The motoring lobby needs to be convinced. To counter their concerns the Council have not reduced the parking area, just redistributed it.

David Naylor



Wheelrights Website

Over the past year or two, there has been a debate about our website. Wheelrights.org.uk was set up from scratch in 2007 when *Wheelrights* was revived by Nick Guy and myself, with Nick as Chair and me as Secretary. I, having a background in computing, enjoyed the challenge of setting up the website. However my background was in Fortran which is rather different from HTML and the other languages needed for a website. So, since then (I am still webmaster) I have been trying to master HTML, CSS (Cascading Style Sheets) which controls the formatting, php and JavaScript, the last two to enable user interaction.

Initially because of my inexperience and later, perhaps because of my instinctive aversion to 'following the crowd' (aka arrogance), the site has been subject to some criticism: it is deemed not to be 'modern' and to be ineffective in marketing *Wheelrights*. In defence I see the main purpose of the website is as a source of information for members, not a marketing tool, for which social media should be used. My priority has been to make the information in it easy to find, and to this end I recently added a search facility (on the home page). I also aim to make the site attractive, both in the layout and choice of colours and by means of a limited use of photos. I have avoided the practice of some sites which fill the screen with pictures, sometimes covering up useful things like a menu.

A problem has been that search engines have not been finding the site. Searchers are directed to *Wheelwrights* sites of which there seem to be several across the UK, some manufacturing wheels and others being inns or pubs. Following advice I have included a note in the 'meta' section on the home page stating that we are *not* *Wheelwrights*. This seems to be having some effect.

Because of these perceived problems it was decided a year or two ago to look into setting up a new website which would complement the existing one. The latest thinking however is that to avoid competition with the existing site it would be quite separate, focussing on active travel, thereby implicitly supporting the *Wheelrights* website. A new 'movement' for which the 'new website' would be adapted is proposed, as Nick explains in his article which follows this one.

My latest thinking is to introduce a 'Members' page. This would be an interactive forum, posting on which would be limited to members but all site visitors would be able to view the posts. This is quite an ambitious undertaking and I will need the help of IT professionals. Fortunately two well qualified members are volunteering their support.

They can help with technical issues, but in addition wider support is needed. To this end they, one other and I are looking into how to share the running of the website so that it can be seamlessly taken over when, in the not too distant future, I leave the stage.

Needless to say I am pleased to receive feed back on the above, either directly to me or by a letter to this Newsletter.

David Naylor

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A new Active Travel ‘Movement’?

Wheelrights members and officers have recently been discussing whether *Wheelrights* needs a new website and/or name.

There was a large response to Dareyoush’s consultation in 2023, with a majority of respondents wishing to see a new name and new website. However a majority of our officers felt a new website would lead to duplication and confusion. Instead they recommended that our existing website be revamped. David explains what is proposed in his article on p. 5

Wheelrights have already spent money on a draft mock up of a new website, and I have gathered a group of younger members interested in updating it. It would use *wordpress*, several members (IT specialists) advising that this would make it easier to maintain and update the site.

Meanwhile *Wheelrights* are struggling to connect with the younger generation who seem to have a growing awareness of the Climate Emergency and the importance of active and sustainable travel. The Environment Centre’s Bike Week event and our campaign for a bike track along Walter Rd has helped us spread our message with younger people and families.

Wheelrights officers have made good contacts with two walking groups in Swansea, and with several individuals wishing to campaign for better and cheaper bus services.

So all of this has led to the idea of a new ‘movement’ around active travel, which could use the proposed new website. The movement’s main aim would be to promote active travel (including cycling), which would also help us attract new younger members to

Wheelrights.

Suggested names for the new movement are “Car(e)free Swansea” and “Carfree Active Travel Swansea” (CATS).



I am grateful for all your comments and suggestions, and am asking our officers to put this on the agenda for discussion at our next *Wheelrights* meeting.

Nick Guy

The new movement would like to see this in Swansea.

Cape of Good Hope?

Question: For how many winters is a modern, rain-proof cycling jacket waterproof?

Answer: one! By the second winter it leaks a bit. By the third winter it is porous. Dejected with this situation, and having wasted time and money on a few desperate measures (Nikwax!) I purchased an old-fashioned waxed cotton cape (from Carradice) two winters ago, and am starting to bond with it. So what have I learnt?

Firstly, the waist-strap and thumb-loop are vital, otherwise it *will* blow upwards and cover your face. This makes it impossible to signal left with my hand, so I use my leg instead. It does work with a front light, but you have to mount it *underneath* the handlebars. You *can* wear a cape and rucksack at the same time, but you have to wear the rucksack on the inside! However, you can't wear a reflective sash, belt or sam-browne, because they have to be on the outside. The cape has its own reflective strip, but only on the back, but it seems to be enough. I re-waxed it before the second winter (using Halley Stevensons Reproofing Wax) which took about 30 minutes using a cloth and hairdryer. It is now more waterproof than when it came from the factory. The cotton expands when wet, making it stiffer and more waterproof, and shrinks when dry, making it more breathable. Nowadays, they would call that an 'intelligent fabric'. I think it's just clever.



It's quite warm under there, so if you do get wet, the amazing thing is that you will dry out again. It's good on frosty mornings (in combination with electrically-heated socks), when I feel like I'm inside a tent, and can use thinner gloves. It excels in damp, drizzly conditions, where other waterproofs leave you just as wet on the inside as out. I've ridden home in a downpour just wearing jeans and overshoes, and have just got used to not having to change trousers. The hood of the cape fits under my helmet, but it could do with more of a peak to keep the rain off my glasses. The enemy of the cape is the wind. Trousers get wet in a strong crosswind, and a headwind creates noticeable drag. A longer cape would make that worse. Despite this, I have not felt out of control.

Perhaps a plastic cape would be totally waterproof (Carradice sell them as well), but that wasn't what I was after. I'm happy with my foray into WW1 technology, and if there's rain on the forecast, I will always have my cape with me. More to the point, it avoids the purchase and disposal of a plastic cycling top every two years.

Bill Gannon

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Cycle helmets: CUK's position

It is quite a while since helmets were on the agenda so, being Swansea's Cycling UK rep., I thought readers might be interested in CUK's views on this controversial subject.

As those who know me know, I don't wear one. Following an accident in 1992 I decided that maybe I should. I did so for three years, but then, having done some research, I decided that for the sort of cycling I do (commuting and touring, not racing) it was better not to, and I have not worn one since. Instead, judging that being visible is more important, I wear a white cap. I have given my helmet to Edward Bear (pictured) who is nearly as old as me. Not that he will have that much use for it!



What follows is gleaned from Cycling UK's website. It starts with:

There is no justification for making helmet-wearing compulsory: it could undermine levels of cycle use and, in any case, the effectiveness of helmets is far from clear.

This is followed by:

Headline message

- Cycling UK is opposed to both cycle helmet laws and to helmet promotion campaigns because these are almost certainly detrimental to public health. Evidence shows that the health benefits of cycling are so much greater than the relatively low risks involved, that even if these measures caused only a very small reduction in cycle use, this would still almost certainly mean far more lives being lost through physical inactivity than helmets could possibly save, however effective.
- Much evidence suggests that neither enforced helmet laws nor promotion campaigns reduce serious head injuries, except by reducing cycling; and that remaining cyclists do not gain any detectable reduction in risk, and may lose some of the benefits from 'safety in numbers.
- So instead of focusing on helmets, health and road safety professionals and others should promote cycling as a safe, normal, aspirational and enjoyable activity, using helmet-free role-models and imagery. Individual cyclists may sometimes choose to use helmets, either for confidence or because of the type of cycling they are doing. However, they should not feel under any pressure to wear them. For the sake of our health, it is more important to encourage people of all ages to cycle, than to make an issue of whether they use a helmet when doing so.

Ten bullet points of comment then follow under "**Cycling UK View**". Their essence is:

They reinforce the headline message by recommending that government and health and road safety bodies should encourage cycling; that road safety policies should prioritise measures to reduce the risks which deter people from cycling, namely: traffic speeds, hostile roads and irresponsible driving. Helmet laws reduce cycling and thereby undermine its benefits. Helmets are not effective in reducing injuries; they are even counter-productive. Whether or not to wear one should be up to individuals.

An article providing a different perspective is planned for the Summer Newsletter.

David Naylor

Forthcoming events

(This information and more is provided on the 'Events' page of www.wheelrights.org.uk .)

Wheelrights Routes Group meeting/rides.

These are held most months; in the summer usually at 10.00am on a Saturday in Ripples Café, and in the winter over teams on a Monday evening. The next is scheduled for 6 April in Ripples Café.

Wheelrights public meeting.

An April meeting is planned. Details to come

U3A and Cappuccino Rides.

The U3A rides take place monthly. Allyson expects to revive the Cappuccino ride when it's warmer. See the Events page for both.

Other

Bike week is from 8 to 16 June.

29 May to 2 June: Swansea and Gower Cycling Festival. (See below.)

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Swansea and Gower Cycling Festival

This Festival returns in 2024. Organised by CTC Swansea, it will take place over five days from Wednesday 29th May to Sunday 2nd June. We hope to run fifteen different rides catering for a wide variety of cycling abilities, ranging from those fairly new to cycling, families with children, and more experienced riders keen to take part in a selection of more challenging rides throughout Swansea, Gower, Carmarthenshire and Neath/Port Talbot. We hope the rides programme will be complete by the end of March, and you can keep updated by checking in at the festival's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/150286928380218>.

Mike ODriscoll

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