

North Devon Cycling Forum

Barnstaple Case Study 2014

Update and Summary

October 2020

Introduction

1. North Devon Cycling Forum produced a Barnstaple Case Study in summer 2014. The purpose of the case study was to show how the town could be made more cycling friendly. Although the study received some attention at the time and was presented to the Barnstaple Town Council, it was never adopted. Shortly afterwards, the studies principle author, Eric van der Horst, returned to the Netherlands and the study lost its main driver.
2. The original study never had an Executive Summary. It was very thorough and detailed, but not easy to digest. The purpose of this Summary is to update the context for the study and to outline its findings and recommendations in a form that can be readily picked up and discussed, with the intention that, once agreed by the public and key partners, its recommendations should be implemented.

The Context for Cycling 2020

3. In summer 2020 the Department for Transport published a report entitled Gear Change, which it described as a bold vision for cycling and walking. The Introduction to the report set out the main benefits of cycling and walking. These included:
 - Improving air quality
 - combatting climate change
 - improving health and wellbeing
 - addressing inequalities and
 - tackling road congestion
4. The report included four main themes:

Theme 1: Better streets for cycling and people

Theme 2: Cycling at the heart of decision-making

Theme 3: Empowering and encouraging local authorities

Theme 4: Enabling people to cycle and protecting them when they do

5. The report followed shortly after the announcement of £2bn funding to improve cycling infrastructure. This funding had to be bid for by local authorities. It has to be said that the sudden announcement of additional funding, coming as it did at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic when local authorities were struggling to deliver core services, and the very short timescale for bids to be prepared and submitted caused some problems, including gathering public support for cycling infrastructure proposals through local consultation.
6. In some ways the Barnstaple Case Study was ahead of its time. In 2014 there were neither Government policy encouragement nor financial incentives available for cycling. Local authorities were in their fourth year of austerity-driven cuts and there was little funding available for cycling infrastructure improvements. The other issue is that, when the Case

Study was published, there was no adopted Local Plan for North Devon. In 2020 the situation has changed significantly. The Local Plan was adopted in October 2018 and has something to say about cycling and cycle routes in the town. Whilst local authorities are, arguably, in an even worse state financially due to continued austerity and the impact of Covid-19 on income, there is now clear Government policy and funding to encourage investment in cycling and walking. The 2014 study had its main emphasis on safety. In this it fits well with Themes 1 and 4 of the DoT's report. Now, though, there is a greater emphasis on the public health benefits of an active lifestyle, again partly driven by the impact of the pandemic. It is in this context that this summary and update of the Barnstaple Case Study is prepared.

Summarising the Barnstaple Case Study

Town Centre Analysis

7. One of the strengths of the Case Study lay in its analysis of cycling facilities in Barnstaple. It points out that much of the existing cycling infrastructure was provided opportunistically, from closed railway lines, rather than being strategically planned. The consequence of this is that, with the exception of the loop that links Whiddon valley with Rock Park, much of the existing provision follows the banks of the Taw. There is little east-west provision linking residential areas, including new developments, with the town centre. The greatest weakness in the network is the lack of a safe link between the north and south banks of the Taw. Closure of the Iron Bridge linking Rock Park with Seven Brethren, as a result of the discovery of corrosion in the central pier, has exacerbated this.
8. The Study suggests that any investment in cycling for Barnstaple town centre should focus on the three main issues:
 - Finding a solution for the important missing link across the historic Long Bridge
 - Extension of the riverside cycle routes into the town centre, with new cycle routes allowing cross-town-travel and true access to destinations
 - Creation of new cycle routes which connect the town centre with its nearby residential areas.
9. The Study recognises that finding solutions will be difficult. Recent events have borne this out. It sets out three questions to be asked of any proposals. They are worth setting out in this summary.
 - Does the proposal provide a good balance between a high potential of usage and cost, so is it best value for money?
 - What are the effects of the proposal on existing traffic flows and other activities?
 - If there are measurable "negative" effects or issues, is there be a different way to achieve the same outcome?

Solutions

10. Before making recommendations, the Study looks at a range of solutions and comments on one particular non-solution. The solutions are:
 - 20 is plenty: 20 mph zones on roads where the cycle network is on-road and in residential areas leading to the cycle network
 - Shared road space: on busier roads where cycle paths can't be built due to lack of space (but which are also essential links for the cycle network) road lay outs could be adjusted to allow cyclists and pedestrians to communicate with drivers on an equal level. Simple removal of centre road lines and/or complete redesign are its tools.

- Cycle paths away from the road: cycling in any serious motorised traffic is the largest barrier for uptake in cycling, so cycle paths should be in place on corridors where there are no alternatives to busy roads. New paths ideally have separate space for walking and cycling. If this is not achievable, shared paths are an acceptable compromise, so long as these are not too “cramped”. Where a shared path is parallel to a road, path users should get priority above turning traffic.
 - Consistent Destination Signage: to attract more users, the cycle network needs to be visible in the streets. Barnstaple already has a lot to offer for cycling, but many routes hardly get used, just because the public is not aware the routes are there!
 - Small schemes, BIG changes: a review and upgrade of existing cycle routes
11. The non-solution named in the Study is the use of on-road cycle lanes, which it considers dangerous.

Town Centre Recommendations

12. The recommendations for the town centre are in two groups: The Long Bridge Corridor and Town Centre Cycle Routes.
13. Having analysed the available options, the Study makes three recommendations for the Long Bridge:

Stage one: a 20-mph speed limit between the closest traffic lights on both river banks.

Stage two: when the bridge is due resurfacing in the future, the centre road line should NOT be put back in.

Stage three would be long-term: the removal of all kerbs and tarmac off the bridge and replacement with historic materials, making it a truly shared space.

The Study pointed out that Stages one and two were, even then, already in place on Bideford Long Bridge. It considers Stage three to be a revolutionary concept and that it may take several years before the town is ready for it.

14. The Study makes a number of recommendations for Town Centre Cycle Routes. They can be summarised as follows:
- A 20-mph zone for the Town Centre as whole
 - Main town centre cycle corridors: The Strand
 - Main town centre cycle corridors: Boutport Street
 - Signage and improved bike parking for the Town Centre as whole
15. The Study then looks at cycle routes to and from the town centre and makes the following route recommendations:
- Route 1: Rolle Quay Bridge – Pilton College
 - Route 2: Boutport Street Corner – Raleigh & Yeo Valley
 - Route 3: Boutport Street – Gorwell
 - Route 4: Boutport Street – Chanters Hill
 - Route 5: Queen Street – Forches
 - Route 6: The Square – Newport
 - Route 7: Long Bridge - Sticklepath
16. The Study finally looks at routes further afield as development takes place, in locations such as Fremington/Bickington/Roundswell/Larkbear and Landkey Road, and suggests that further routes might be added:

- Route 8: Fremington-Roundswell-Sticklepath
- Route 9: Landkey-Newport
- Route 10: Landkey-Westacott-Whiddon Valley

Cost estimations

17. The Study gave cost estimations. These are not repeated here as costs and funding opportunities will have changed (although inflation during the intervening period has been low).

Future provision

18. More usefully, the Study includes a map of future provision, which is appended, with the proposed cycle routes shown in blue.