

Submission to the APPGCW on CWIS 2

Introduction

My name is Nick Hanna, the founder and Chair of Sussex Greenways, a community organisation (currently awaiting CIO designation). I'm making this submission because I believe the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy has failed to deliver the necessary infrastructure or behaviour change to promote active travel in rural areas.

Background

I have been a cycle campaigner for over 15 years. I founded Hastings Urban Bikes (HUB) in 2005 and was Chair until I moved from Hastings in 2010. During that period I was instrumental in creating the Hastings Cycling and Walking Network and worked closely with Hastings Borough Council, East Sussex County Council and other stakeholders. My organization was a key partner in helping Sustrans win £50 million from the Big Lottery Fund for the delivery of Connect2, a national programme of cycle route improvements. From 2010 onwards I worked with the Rother Environmental Group on rural cycle routes in the Rye area, where I now live. I'm also a member of Cycle East Sussex, an umbrella group of around 15 cycling organisations.

The problem

In the last 15 years, I can think of only two cycle routes being built in the Hastings area, one of which was part of the Connect2 programme mentioned already, which delivered a 2.2km link along the seafront between Bexhill

and Hastings. This route has proved incredibly popular but was mostly funded from outside sources (ie The Big Lottery).

My experience, which I believe is shared by many other members of Cycle East Sussex, is that the existing top-down model for delivering cycling and walking infrastructure is incredibly frustrating for those of us working at grassroots level who are passionate about active travel and desperate to see improvements. We rarely see anything being built.

Another major problem which I'd like to highlight is the imbalance between urban and rural infrastructure and the almost complete lack of any attention being paid to rural areas at both national and county level.

For instance, *Gear Change* states: 'Our main focus will be on medium-sized town, larger towns and cities' (July 2020) whilst East Sussex County Council's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan states: 'We will prioritize areas largely located on the coastal strip and the larger market towns in the County' (draft, October 2020).

This leaves rural areas deprived of investment at both Government and County level.

Our rural roads are race-tracks where people feel it is unsafe to walk, cycle, or ride a horse. In addition, rural traffic has vastly increased in the past two years due to (amongst other factors) the huge number of vans now delivering internet shopping, often at high speed. This has made our rural roads even more dangerous.

Our proposal

The aim of Sussex Greenways is to develop a new model for delivering safe, mostly traffic-free or traffic-calmed multi-user routes in rural areas. We're proposing to do this by improving the existing Rights of Way network and creating Quiet Lanes. Together, these changes can deliver a rural active travel network with the capacity to connect our communities, provide healthy outdoor spaces for families to exercise and enjoy being in nature, promote the rural economy by linking rural micro-businesses with our towns and villages, and provide long term economic benefits from green tourism.

All these goals are entirely missing from existing Government and County policy on Active Travel.

Our approach

Our starting point is the Countryside Act 1968 Section 30, which provides cyclists with the right to ride on bridleways. However, many bridleways, byways and similar Rights of Way (RoW) are unsuitable for everyday use because they're churned up by horses or mountain bikes and poorly maintained. Nonetheless, the rural bridleway network provides an incredible opportunity to create traffic-free multi-user routes (greenways) away from the main road network:

England

Footpaths	90,000 miles (146,000 km)
Bridleways and byways	26,000 miles (41,700 km)

East Sussex

Footpaths	1,614 miles (2,597 km)
Bridleways and byways	597 miles (961 km).

Around 30% of the Rights of Way network could become Greenways.

In addition, these routes can be built at a much lower cost than urban routes. Whereas a typical urban cycle route can cost anywhere from £500,000 to £1 million per kilometre, we believe that we can create simple, multi-user routes on existing bridleways for around £50,000 per kilometre. In many cases all that is required is scrub clearance, improved drainage, and the laying of a limestone surface. The aim is to create an all-weather, year-round route rather than one which can only be used in the drier months.

We are determined to work with user groups including disabled people, walkers, equestrians, and others to ensure that we create greenway routes that are suitable and safe for all.

Rural routes can often be hillier, however with the increasing uptake in electric bikes this will become less of a problem over time. E-bikes will also encourage people to make slightly longer journeys between villages or into towns.

We'd also like to see a programme of upgrading Footpaths where it makes sense to do so, changing them into Bridleways which could be used by cyclists. This is particularly true where there is a connecting link which would make sense of a much longer route.

We expect that, in time, these routes will link up with urban routes being built by Local Authorities or the National Cycle Network being built by Sustrans. At present, Sustrans' policy is only to create or improve routes which connect to the National Cycle Network. Whilst this is understandable, we believe that building 'mini-greenways' (sometimes only one or two kilometres long) can prove highly beneficial in providing green spaces for exercise and connecting communities.

Funding

Because no Government funding is available for rural areas, we're fund-raising from the ground up, starting with sponsored rides and walks on local bridleways/greenway routes. In doing this, we aim to:

- Provide people with the opportunity to take direct action on climate change and support their local greenway routes by the simple act of taking part in a sponsored ride or walk, which almost anyone can do.
- Raise awareness of the potential for traffic-free greenway routes in our local communities and the opportunities they represent.
- Raise cash to start improving the routes.
- Leverage this community fund-raising to attract grants and donations for further improvements or major construction costs.

Our target funders will be Parish and Town councils through Neighbourhood Plans and Community Infrastructure Levy, District Councils, Environmental Grants, and Private and Corporate Donations.

Quiet Lanes

First introduced in the Quiet Lanes and Home Zones (England) Regulations 2006, No.2082. ‘The objective of Quiet Lanes are to reduce traffic dominance and vehicle speeds and encourage drivers to be more mindful of non-motorised users such as walkers, cyclists and horse-riders and encourage great usage by the latter groups.’

The Suffolk example

In 2013-2014 Suffolk ran a pilot project of Quiet Lanes in the Suffolk Coast AONB covering 13 Quiet Lanes in 7 parishes.

In 2020-2021 Suffolk County Council extended this with a £235,000 grant and had expressions of interest from 89 parishes for 209 Quiet Lanes totalling 166 miles (267 kilometres).

Suffolk CC Highways Dept estimated £4,700 per parish but this was reduced to £1,000 per designated parish thanks to a collaborative self-help community partnership.

Role of Quiet Lanes

We believe Quiet Lanes have a part to play in reducing traffic speeds in rural areas and creating safer roads for active travel, even though they’re only advisory. They are, however, much cheaper than the alternatives such as 20 MPH zones or engineering measures. If engineering measures were also available, this would be desirable.

The growth in Electric Vehicles makes sense for Quiet Lanes. Drivers of

silent vehicles are more aware of their surroundings, probably more open to environmentally-conscious driving, and fit better with bicycles, horses and pedestrians.

County councils say that ‘Quiet Lanes don’t work’ and that ‘they prefer to focus resources on more effective measures’.

Our response to this is:

- 1) We’re entitled to implement Quiet Lanes under our Local Transport Plan which specifically supports self-funded schemes which help meet policy objectives.
- 2) We will raise the money ourselves if necessary.
- 3) **Quiet Lanes are better than nothing, which is currently what’s on offer for rural communities.**

DEFRA/ELMs

As part of our aspirations for a rural cycling and walking network we are hopeful that current ongoing trials using the mechanism of Environmental Land Management schemes to persuade landowners to dedicate and then be paid to maintain public access ways and green corridors in the countryside will prove fruitful. We are not experts in this area, we would refer you to the trials currently taking place with DEFRA and the Trials Trust in Somerset who have done considerable work on this already.

Green Jobs and Rights of Way Departments

We believe that part of the problem with the appallingly slow pace of delivery of cycle infrastructure is that the funding is routed through the

transport/Highways Departments and that there is an inherent contradiction in expecting departments whose remit is to build roads to build cycle infrastructure because the latter will inevitably take a back seat to their primary purpose in terms of budgets and resources.

We recommend, therefore, that APPGCW look closely at the idea of channeling cycling and walking funding into Rights of Way departments instead of Highways. They have the knowledge and experience to improve the RoW network to create greenways and support active travel.

I understand that there are capacity restraints within RoW departments which are partly down to how many maintenance teams they have available. Therefore, we would strongly suggest that an increase in budgets for maintenance teams would be a sensible first step.

Furthermore, we suggest that a massive expansion in training and recruitment for maintenance teams either working alongside or as part of RoW Departments would provide a welcome increase in green jobs and provide attractive, outdoor team work for young people.

We would be interested in working with Government on a pilot scheme to create rural Greenways in conjunction with Rights of Way departments. We believe this is a fruitful avenue towards creating a rural active travel network.

Conclusions

There is enormous demand for active travel on safe multi-user routes in rural areas which is not being met at Government or County level.

There is a massive potential for converting existing Rights of Way into traffic-free Greenways which would promote active travel in rural areas. At the same time, a programme such as this would create thousands of worthwhile green jobs.

Local communities should be supported in the creation of Quiet Lanes, with the combination of Quiet Lanes and traffic-free Greenways helping create conditions where cyclists, walkers and equestrians feel safer in rural areas.

Funding for a rural cycling and walking network should be channeled through Rights of Way departments or statutory bodies such as High Weald AONB, South Downs AONB, rather than through Highways Depts.

Thank you for reading my submission.

Nick Hanna

Chair, Sussex Greenways

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