

## **Cycling: Group discussion with people who are part of the Elders Council**

### **1 Background**

Newcastle City Council has secured funding to improve cycling infrastructure and introduce a complementary public health programme aiming to encourage people across communities to cycle. HAREF was commissioned by the public health team to facilitate a discussion with people from the Elders Council, to make sure that the programme meets the needs of older people, and to produce this report.

### **2 People who took part in group discussions**

12 people, 9 women and 3 men, took part in the group discussion on 14 February 2014, all over the age of 50 and from the majority white community.

### **3 Experience of cycling**

Everyone in the group has experience of cycling, and several regularly cycle long distance (25 miles) and take cycling holidays (Cycle Touring Club members). One person bought a bicycle through a scheme at work, though did not use it much "because I found it was quicker to walk and it wasn't safe to cycle". Several people mentioned the social value of cycling, saying it can be a "great laugh".

### **4 Things that would encourage / motivate people to cycle more**

#### **4a Outreach to existing community groups**

Participants want their experience as cyclists to be used in 'cycling city' developments, and to hear about what's happening via the Elders Council. They are happy to be involved in further discussion/planning, as appropriate. They strongly support ideas for: beginner's confidence building session, cycle maintenance sessions, and led cycle rides.

#### **4b Easy access to information about where to cycle safely**

All participants agreed that information about joined-up routes would encourage them to cycle. The information should be available in different formats, to meet the needs of cyclists across a range of ability and level of experience. One person compared the helpful signposting from Newcastle city centre to the north sea ferry terminal with the lack of information for cyclists arriving at the central railway station:

- That's my bugbear. For strangers who arrive by train there is absolutely no signage or information. Work on the Central Station needs to link up with this 'cycling city' work.
- There could be an information point for cyclists in the new station entrance.
- There used to be cycle route maps in libraries and at the Newcastle Tourist Information Centre. It would be good to make them available again so people can just pick them up, because not everyone has easy access to that information online.

#### **4c (linked to 4b) Increased confidence, through knowledge of cycle lanes / routes**

Participants in the group discussion expressed different levels of cycling confidence:

- I cycle from the east end in to work and I know that route, but I didn't feel OK to cycle in today because I didn't know where the cycle lanes were.
- I am quietly confident to cycle, though I didn't do any cycling as a child, *and* I need very clear cycle lanes.

#### **4d Uninterrupted, clearly identified cycle lanes**

There was general agreement that people's confidence is boosted when they can easily identify where cycle lanes are, and when lanes do not suddenly disappear:

- We need cycle lanes that are clearly marked and don't trail off, and better marking where routes intersect. There needs to be regular remarking of cycle lanes - they tend to get worn away.

#### **4e Safe cycle storage**

Participants highlighted the issue of cycle storage:

- What always puts me off cycling in to town is that there's no safe place to park. I see a lot of damaged bikes that have been vandalised. It puts people off.
- Cycle storage should be taken in to account in the redevelopment of the entrance to Newcastle central railway station.

#### **4f Joined-up approach to planning and design, *and* involvement of cyclists**

Some optimism was expressed about the potential of the funding that the council has secured, tempered by experience of things not always being joined up in the most effective way. Several people referred to countries such as Holland, where "everything is geared up for cycling and it is so much simpler". Fenham Hall Drive was mentioned specifically in terms of "don't do it like this", and Gosforth High Street was highlighted as an area where people routinely park in cycle lane space. There was reference to the importance of coordinating cycling infrastructure development with enforcement of parking regulations and the law in relation to cycle safety equipment and cycling on pavements. One person talked about a well used cycle route being lost because of housing development, and asked for new housing estate planning to take cycling space in to consideration. Another gave an example of successful cycling lane introduction in a residential area (North Tyneside), with no blocking of lanes by residents parking because of community involvement in the design and subsequent sense of ownership by everyone. The importance of investment in existing infrastructure was highlighted, with reference to a lack of maintenance of the Walker Riverside part of the coast to coast cycle path, which is being commented on by cyclists nationally. A link was suggested between a cutback in ranger numbers and build up of rubbish, including broken glass. Several participants asked for coordination of cycling and walking opportunities, with equal attention given to both, and preparation of information about graded (possibly colour-coded) paths and cycle lanes, so that people can move easily between activities:

- My husband and I used to cycle and when he died I joined a walking group. I still cycle round my local area and round the park.

### **5 Barriers to cycling**

#### **5a Anxiety about road safety**

All participants expressed concern about cyclists' safety on Newcastle roads:

- There's a need for clear messages for motorists. I won't get on my bike until they sort out the routes so that it feels safe.
- If I'm visiting someone in the RVI I go across the town moor on my bike but it's different on the roads.
- The threat's the traffic.
- There are faults on both sides, because some cyclists float about in ordinary clothing.

#### **5b (linked to 5a) Interrupted cycle lanes**

There was general agreement that frequent interruption of cycle lanes on some routes is a barrier to confident cycling:

- Some cycle lanes from the east of Newcastle to the city centre are OK, and others are interrupted, like the one over Byker Bridge.
- Interruption of cycle lanes means I won't go cycling on my own. I need it to be simpler safer and easier.
- I won't get on my bike until they sort out the cycle lane routes.

## **6 Access to information about activities in the city**

The Elders Council newsletter is a good source of information for people in this group, as is the Information Now website. Participants suggested Newcastle council website, libraries, GP surgeries and cycle shops as useful places for displaying information about cycling activities.

## **7 Silver Cycling**

There was no time to discuss this with the group.

## **8 Cycling4Health**

As above.

## **9 Extra information**

The following were mentioned during group discussions:

- Bicycle recycling shops - reference to one in Byker (Recyke Y'Bike).
- Byker Bikers is a group for people with cycling ability to ride twenty miles or more. Bikes can be hired. Funding is apparently at risk. Contact person is Sue Carlisle (278 8444).
- Age UK receives enquires about cycling opportunities and needs to be part of any info network.
- Sky Ride website has information about cycling in Newcastle and Gateshead, including rides from Newcastle quayside.
- Kids Kabin in Byker offers cycle maintenance and repairs. Projects like this need to be built in to community cycling hubs.
- Newcastle Cycle Hub (quayside) has lots of information about local cycle rides on its website. It is a social enterprise that promotes and facilitates cycling.
- Sustrans joins up safe cycle routes nationally (national cycle network) and is a good point of reference.