



Weavers Wheel information sheet:

Funding:

£600k of Local Growth Funding has now been secured from the Lancashire Local Enterprise Partnership for the financial years 2015/16 & 2016/17. This capital investment will be further supported by the Councils Local Transport Plan over the next 4 years (£200k) with revenue funding to support the marketing / promotion and community engagement provided through the Connecting East Lancashire project (BwD Connect) via the Local Sustainable Transport Fund.

Length:

The Weavers Wheel is approx. 26km. However, a further 66km of route will be signed / improved to create several 'Spurs' and 'Spokes' to connect the Wheel to Blackburn Town Centre and various neighbouring towns and employment sites. This investment will initiate the start of a strategic cycle network for Blackburn with Darwen and East Lancashire.

Timescale:

2014 – 2019 (bulk of funding and delivery in 2015/16 and 2016/17)

Inspiration:

As a recognised priority within the East Lancashire Highways and Transport Masterplan this scheme has been developed thanks to the support of the local community (thanks Kev and Vicky!).

Having invested a significant amount of resources into enhancing the local cycle infrastructure and the cycling opportunities available to residents and visitors in partnership with British Cycling and local cycle clubs this investment is inspired by local people wanting to share our beautiful countryside and changing urban landscape and to encourage more people to cycle to access employment, training, education and leisure opportunities.

Background:

- The development of the borough's cycle network has been described as somewhat sporadic, since it has largely been developed in an uncoordinated fashion following opportunities presented thanks to local highway improvements, road safety schemes and development management decisions.
- Cycle provision within the borough can be split into five main parts -off street, on street, unmarked on street (quiet roads), public bridleways and designated mountain bike routes.
- Whilst there are approximately 34kms of off road cycle routes in the borough and a further 132kms of bridleway a coordinated strategic network of routes does not currently exist.

- It could be argued that our existing strategic network is less than 10kms in length following the course of the fully signed and well used section of National Cycle Network 6 which cuts East - West through the borough.
- The existing mishmash of cycling routes and infrastructure is therefore viewed as confusing, difficult and even unsafe. With some of the earlier schemes introduced in the borough now in danger of becoming low quality and challenging to navigate the council has been advised to avoid the promotion of certain sections of the network (e.g. Arran Trail).

Cycling levels in BwD:

- Cycling across the UK has witnessed a boom in recent years owing to several factors including the increasing cost of travel and the success by British athletes at an elite level on the track at Olympic, Commonwealth games and World Championships plus the Tour de France.
- Despite the lack of a coordinated network of cycle routes the number of cyclists recorded in the borough has grown over the last decade thanks to Local Transport Plan and Local Sustainable Transport Fund capital investment, the development of a successful led ride programme, enhanced bike ability training for children and adults, better marketing and promotion and a partnership with British Cycling.
- Cordon count data for Blackburn town centre, which is collated by the Council each year, suggests a 180% increase in the numbers of people recorded cycling into Blackburn town centre over a 12 hour period (0730-19:30) since 2001. Whilst a line of best fit identifies a steady increase in numbers recorded cycling there is a noticeable pattern in sharp peaks over the last 13 years which correlates with periods of above average levels of local investment in the cycling network.
- Whilst this is impressive growth and possibly reflective of cycling movements elsewhere in the borough, as a percentage of all traffic entering Blackburn town centre during a 12 hour period the numbers remain extremely low at just 0.72% of all trips into the town.
- Moreover, whilst commuting by bike increased nationally by 17% to more than 760,000 people in the period 2001 – 2011, census 2011 data revealed commuter cycling rates in the borough remained very low at just 1% (only 600 people).
- There is however grounds for optimism. Cycling is the third most popular recreational activity in the UK. An estimated 3.1 million people ride a bicycle each month. As a form of exercise, cycling has broad appeal. Toddlers, pensioners, the able-bodied or people with disabilities of both sexes and all ethnic origins can all enjoy cycling if they have the right equipment.
- Without significant further investment in the local cycle network the numbers of cyclists in the borough will remain relatively low and the good work over the last decade promoting cycling for commuter and utility trips in partnership with local cycle groups and British Cycling will be wasted.

A recognised priority:

- As a recognised priority within the East Lancashire Highway and Transport Masterplan and subsequently the Lancashire Strategic Economic Plan the Weavers Wheel is being designed to deliver a fully signed regionally important cycle network, helping to transform the perception of cycling and inspire residents and visitors of all ages to undertake more trips by bike whether for employment, training, education or leisure purposes.

- The Weavers Wheel is based on the successful principle of the Guild Wheel in Preston which following its implementation now attracts over 100,000 cyclists per year as well as many thousands of walkers.
- By improving and connecting existing under- utilised sections of the boroughs cycle network with new cycling infrastructure it is intended to create an outer 'wheel' which will encircle the town of Blackburn. Incorporating locally inspired community artwork, information boards and directional signage the intention is to make it easy for people to pick up the 'wheel' at any point along its route. However, the natural start and finish point will be promoted as Witton Country Park and riders as well as walkers will be encouraged to travel the route in a clockwise or counter clockwise direction offering greater flexibility and choice.
- Maximising the use of the Leeds & Liverpool canal towpath, the River Darwen Parkway, the Arran Trail and a mix of other on and off road cycle links the 'wheel' will for the first time provide Blackburn with a convenient, coherent and flexible network encircling the town.
- The outer 'wheel' will be approximately 26km in length and will provide an attractive and rewarding journey which ever direction is taken.
- In order to bridge the gap in the existing cycle network between East Lancashire and Blackburn and beyond to Central Lancashire the 'wheel' will be complimented by a series of 'spurs' serving outlying residential and employment sites and neighbouring towns.
- The 'spurs' will be accessed from various points along the 'wheel' and will serve destinations such as Darwen, Rishton, Oswaldtwistle, Samlesbury (and Preston), Ribble Valley, Great Harwood, Belthorn and Huddlesden. Over 50kms of 'spurs' will be fully signed in order to deliver a regionally significant cycle network.
- A series of 6 'spokes' into Blackburn town centre will also be fully signed from the 'wheel' enabling people to benefit from direct access to local employment, education, retail and leisure opportunities by bike. Covering all points of the wheel over 15km of cycling 'spokes' will be fully signed into the town centre.
- In total the Weavers Wheel scheme will be 92kms in length offering cyclists as well as walkers a fully signed interconnected network of routes crossing rich and varied landscape linking existing and planned employment, retail and residential areas with green open space.

Community Engagement:

- Work has already begun with local community groups and schools to develop a range of ideas that will help to promote the route, inform riders/walkers and create an attractive colourful multi user route.
- Working alongside the Community Rail Partnership and a local artist (Alastair Nicholson) the route of the Weavers Wheel will be split into themes ranging from recycling, rural, technology, language and sound and a number of art installation will be produced resulting from the community participation.
- The majority of the Weavers Wheel route will be developed over the next 2 years and the community work will be delivered in tandem.
- It is anticipated that by the beginning of 2017 most of the route will be complete and the community art and horticultural projects delivered.