

Walking the Walk

Well, if you can't persuade the county council to apply for Government funding for an essential community project, there's nothing to be lost by going straight to the top. So, largely thanks to the efforts of Ros Kent, Richard Sonley and Phil Loder, Bike Safe Chairman Ian Leggett, together with trustees of the campaign, met with Prime Minister David Cameron and local MP Nicola Blackwood at the Talbot Inn on 8th March to discuss the B4044 Community Path which will join their two constituencies.

Security was understandably tight, but following an initial discussion at the Talbot, the two MPs plus the Bike Safe team took a walk along the first part of the route towards Oxford in an effort to understand why the county council is so reluctant to apply for money from the pot when the project has such a groundswell of support.

Central government is making new funding worth over £40m available for projects such as this. This is extra money and will not come from the existing county council budget.

In London, Mayor Boris has already pledged: "I will more than double London's cycling budget – to a total of almost £400m over the next three years, two-and-a-half times more than previously planned. In 2015, we will be spending £145m a year on cycling, or roughly £18 a head, almost on a par with The Netherlands."

But Oxfordshire's county council leadership is reluctant to apply for the extra money available (Bike Safe cannot apply for it directly). County council deputy leader Rodney Rose said: "In an ideal world we would be able say something more positive, but the competing demands for investment across all our service areas, against a backdrop of on-going pressures on public finances, means we can't take this scheme forward at present."

Chairman Ian Leggett was far more impressed with the level of interest and the engagement of the Prime Minister and Ms Blackwood. "It is in stark contrast to the relevant leadership of the county council", he says, "none of whom have visited nor met with us."



Mr Cameron described the Community Path as "a really worthwhile campaign."

"Obviously," he said, "there are lots of hurdles to cross, questions that need to be answered and funds that have to be sought, but I commend the group for getting together and putting so much work in."

He added: "I believe it is important to help people cycle to work and that we create good community paths... They seem to have a lot of good arguments on their side, they have the support of landowners, the district council and local people and so I will do what I can to make sure they get good answers from the county council."

Ms Blackwood, who has always supported the path, said: "I think it is a great campaign, and it is particularly good because they are not just putting their hand out. They are saying 'we are going to do our bit, put together a feasibility study and match funding, but also want the county and Government to support cycling in Oxfordshire'."

Her remarks were given extra weight in view of the fact that TOE (the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment) had just awarded the project a new grant that day.

"We hope that the county council leadership will now appreciate just how much support there is for this project at all levels," said Jean Metson after the

meeting. She cycles into work in the University Science Area every day and is familiar with the hazards of the B4044 for cyclists and the impossibility of it for pedestrians.

"We hope that the county council will now move ahead with making an application to win the extra money for Oxfordshire," she added.

"We have been corresponding with Mr Cameron and Ms Blackwood and their teams since September last year," explained Phil Loder. "We are very grateful to everyone who has helped to make this meeting possible, especially Trevor Johnson at The Talbot Inn who hosted the meeting free of charge."

SOS: Support Our Simon

This year could be a HUGE year for the Community Path, but we need money!

Our next big fundraiser is on *Sunday 14th April* when Simon Banks is doing a sponsored cycle ride from Westminster to Eynsham – close to 80 miles. He's hard at work training for the ride – but there's no better incentive to get across the Chilterns than knowing that lots of people have backed you. If everyone who has signed the petition gives just £5.00, we'll raise over £5000! Please, do it now at <http://localgiving.com/charity/bikesafewestoxford>.

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