

Comments on Hackney's draft Sports Strategy

by the London Cycling Campaign in Hackney

1 About the London Cycling Campaign in Hackney

1.1 The London Cycling Campaign (LCC) is the world's biggest urban cycling promotion organisation, now 25 years old and with a membership approaching 9,000, of whom over 800 are residents of the London Borough of Hackney.

2 Cycling is a formal as well as informal sport

2.1 Cycling is mentioned as part of the brief that the consultants were given, described as an "informal" sport. This is of course true, but the brief should also have recognised that there is significant participation by Hackney residents in cycling as a formal sport, eg in events like the Audax long-distance rides. Hackney even has a number of people who have completed the gruelling four-yearly 1200km Paris-Brest-Paris ride.

3 Sport and health

3.1 The draft says: "There is already a good deal of work taking place in this field ranging from the Council's GP Referral scheme, through the cyclist group set up by the Hackney Primary Care Trust (PCT)..."

The GP Referral scheme is, we assume, a reference to CycleActive, an exercise prescription project implemented by the LCC in Hackney and the London School of Cycling in 2000. Funding came from the Health Action Zone and the Lottery to purchase bikes and instructor time. Participants were referred to the project by GPs. The training was found to be effective and enjoyable for all participants.

As mentioned, the City and Hackney Primary Care Trust cycling group, led by dietician Kate Lees, is doing a lot of good work making it easier for the district nurses, midwives etc to cycle rather than drive for their work-related trips for the trust.

Homerton Hospital also has a very active Bicycle User Group, led by Brian Leveson, which encourages Homerton employees to cycle to work, and promotes better conditions, eg improvements to access and parking.

3.2 We approve of the recommendation that Hackney Sports Forum and other bodies could compile "an annual programme of activity promotion which could include an annual Health Day, regular taster days at leisure centres, dance studios, parks, schools and community centres and one-off events to promote, say, cycling or dance or walking". We would be happy to participate in the cycling-related promotion events.

3.3 It is also good to see Recommendation 3 under the Sports Facilities heading, which says that the priority for any future investment should be given to "promoting and programming parks as venues for physical activity such as softball, cycling, tai chi, walking and informal games. This may mean investment in improved lighting, signing and staff which could be funded from health improvement promotion and other non-traditional budgets."

3.4 Cycling should also be added in as an activity to be promoted by any Hackney equivalent to Camden's Active Health team.

4 Lea Valley Cycle Circuit

4.1 The Lea Valley Cycle Circuit isn't mentioned in the draft, despite this being a cycle sport centre of regional significance just a few hundred metres outside Hackney's border. It needs to be marketed to Hackney residents, and access (especially access by cycle traffic) needs to be improved.

Schools should be encouraged to take pupils there, and should promote both individual skills and competitive road and BMX/MTB racing. This could be done in conjunction with the many cycling clubs based at the Lea Valley Cycle Circuit, enabling them to spot and promote talent.

5 Cycle training for schools

5.1 Cycle training for schools is not mentioned in the draft. This is an important area and is coming up the agenda. Following the grassroots development of schools cycle training by parent-led projects such as STAbikes (Sir Thomas Abney cycle project), the Council's Traffic and Transportation section is bidding to TfL for £100,000 funding for schools cycle training for 04/05. There should be co-ordination between this initiative and the sports strategy.

Cycle training should also be mentioned as a job opportunity in the Sport, Employment & Training section. (N.B. Cycle training will soon have a national certification system).

6 Cycle parking at sports and leisure facilities

6.1 If it's not already there, it is *vital* that any new or refurbished sports facilities have plenty of easily accessible cycle parking, designed in from step one. We do not want a repeat of the ridiculous situation that happened at Clissold Pool with its lack of ample and secure bike parking.

7 General comments applying to cycling and other sports equally

7.1 Some LCCiH members have perceived a lack of linkage with education, training and employment at all levels from coaching and event-official to mechanics, activity-centre staff and business start-up advice. There are NVQs out there covering these areas. The document needs to be rooted in creating a set of tasks, a reason to exist, for the sports development team in Hackney. Without this there will still be a situation where legions of volunteers plug away year in year out and the council still lacks a clearly-defined role.

There is scope to develop competitive leagues between schools, which could be configured along the lines of the ' graded gala' system now deployed by the ASA and others. We can have set of tournaments with the three old boroughs competing within their schools leading to a final and borough champion, more events equals more ' winners' . The SDT can help with police checks from the CRB, purchasing VAT-free for groups, bulk-buying first-aid, H&S and coaching training for groups. The sports development team working with a well-funded and resourced HAVE (Hackney Agency for Volunteering), HSAA (Hackney Schools Athletic Association) or similar bodies for each sport to maintain an annual sporting calendar for the borough to give experience and access to sport to the next generation. This could be done for cycle sport equally as for other sports.

*Compiled by Trevor Parsons for the London Cycling Campaign in Hackney, 12th August 2003
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