



Letter to Editor

Government boost for Cycling and Walking falls at the Medway Towpath

During lockdown the number of cyclists and walkers in Maidstone as in the rest of the UK went up incredibly. It demonstrated that families and cyclists of all generations and confidence will take to their bicycles if safe road conditions are available.

As the Chair of the Maidstone Cycle Campaign Forum and a Fant Councillor, I welcome the Governments support for getting in safe infrastructure for cycling in a number of exemplar schemes across the Country. In Maidstone we are promised cycle lanes along King Street for mid-September 2020 and even a segregated cycle lane from Willington Street to Lenham alongside the A20 during the winter of 2020/21.

All positive and hopefully the start of addressing an integrated package of cycling and walking measures across Maidstone Town and Borough. Unfortunately however all is not rosy the Medway Towpath/ Cycleway was damaged in the February 2020 floods near Aylesford where it was partially undermined. It has since been closed off and now the closure stretch has been extended back along the timber walkway.

Everyone expected that it would be repaired as an urgent priority, alongside all the extra road works undertaken in lockdown, but NO the current site notice states that repair works will not be completed until Summer 2021 a year away. That will be a closure of a 1 ½ years. This is utterly disgraceful and a public scandal.

Since this route opened from Barming Bridge to Aylesford Bridge in 2015, it has become extremely popular with cyclists and pedestrians of all ages and levels of fitness and is now a major cycling route for people to get to the town centre and the Aylesford industrial estates.

It would easily have been possibly over the spring to put in some temporary timber decking to bridge the damaged area, which would have allowed walkers and cyclists to use the route while longer term repairs were done, but no close it off, forget it and hope it goes away seems to be the approach.

The Maidstone Cycle Campaign Forum (MCCF) has raised this issue with the County Council, but to no avail, they clearly do not seem to be interested in prioritising walking and cycling in Kent, despite being happy to take Government money. If this had been the A20 or any main road into or out of Maidstone or the M20, it would have been repaired within hours or days. Because it is used by cyclist and pedestrians it is the bottom of the pile. At a time when KCC is looking to pedestrianise Earl Street and put in cycle lanes on King Street, its lack of support to maintain the best used and valued piece of cycling infrastructure in the Maidstone/ Aylesford area is incredulous.

The towpath is much loved by residents of Barming, East Farleigh, Maidstone and Aylesford, we deserve better and I and the Maidstone Cycle Campaign Forum will make sure that this issue is taken seriously on behalf of all those who use and love the towpath.

If KCC is serious, like the Government is about active travel and encouraging cycling, repairing the Medway Towpath should be its top not bottom priority. Concerned cyclists can contact us at maidstonecycling.uk.

Paul Harper
Chair of Maidstone Cycle Campaign Forum