

On 31 October, Aberdeen Cycle Forum postponed our normal business meeting to welcome the co-leaders of Aberdeen City Council, Cllrs Jenny Laing and Douglas Lumsden for a question & answer session. This note records the main points covered. For simplicity the Q&As are attributed only to 'ACF' or 'ACC'. Questions put by ACF members do not necessarily represent the view of the Forum as a whole.

Attendance: (ACF) 19

Apologies: Cllr Ross Grant 'Cycle Champion'

By way of introduction Jyll Skinner, ACF Chair, gave a quick resume of who we are and what we do. She began with an opening question:

ACF: Are either of you cyclists?

ACC: No.

ACF: We would be delighted to take you on an accompanied ride to let you see for yourself the issues which cyclists in Aberdeen face – we previously did this with former Cllr Ross Thomson, then 'Cycle Champion'.

ACF: Many of the side roads on the periphery of Aberdeen are being systematically destroyed by construction traffic serving the AWPR, even on roads where signs are present saying 'No construction traffic'. These are being deliberately ignored by drivers (and allegedly they are being instructed to do this by some site supervisors) to save time/money. Will these roads ever be properly repaired and where is the money going to come from?

ACC: Disappointing to hear this. ACC act as managing agents so we will follow this up. ACC will get funds from the AWPR project for repairs to be done in spring 2018. Enforcement of the ban on construction traffic is a Police matter but acknowledged that it is difficult to enforce. The AWPR liaison officer is John Wilson so reports could be sent to him, ideally with evidence (photographs and/or registration numbers, details of time & place).

ACF: Can there be an AWPR walk & cycle day ahead of the opening to traffic?

ACC: This is currently being considered. There have been discussions between CTC Grampian, Deeside Thistle and the AWPR Joint Venture.

ACF: Not all cyclists agree that this is something worth doing given that cycling will be prohibited on the road once fully open. What mitigation is there to be to manage through traffic in the city after the AWPR opens?

ACC: Various measures are being considered and will be consulted on.

ACF: We have had difficulty in recent times engaging with officers in ACC. Louise Napier was a reliable contact for many years but has now moved on. Can we have a

single point of contact? Also, when planning our Pedal on Parliament ride in 2016 we were completely unable to contact anyone in the events team, who don't answer the phone or respond to emails. It's very frustrating.

ACC: Alan Simpson is the best person to contact in place of Loiuise. Dawn Schultz leads the events team, but if you have trouble contacting them again you should go direct to JL / DL. JL also Chairs the Board of the Community Planning Partnership which is another avenue to consider to raise matters.

ACF: Nestrans have just appointed a Cycling Development Officer but it is only a 2 year post so the amount which we can expect it to achieve is very limited. Is this just tokenism?

ACC: The post is jointly funded by Sustrans and the 2 Councils (post also covers Aberdeenshire) so the opportunities to do anything else are limited.

ACF: We are overwhelmed with strategies, action plans etc in the Council and other levels of government. All strongly endorse cycling and active travel, but we don't feel that many of these are ever delivered on, so what is the point in having them?

ACC: Strategies need to be translated into action plans and implemented, but what is achieved often comes down to competing financial priorities. ScotGov are good at giving 'direction' without funding necessarily coming with it.

ACF: Surely part of the reason Aberdeen doesn't attract enough funding for active travel is because it either doesn't bid for it, or its bids are rated low because of a lack of delivery, or until recently the lack of an active travel plan?

ACC: That is why the recently adopted action plan is so important. It will allow us to attract more funding in future. A roads hierarchy to be implemented post-AWPR has just been considered by the Communities, Housing and Infrastructure (CH&I) committee.

ACF: ScotGov has just doubled the amount of funding for active travel. Has ACC bid for any of that?

ACC: Improvements are coming to Aberdeen, cleaner buses and a policy on public transport are examples. City Deal funds may help but there are many demands on those including for rail improvements between Aberdeen and Dundee. Remember ACC also gets lobbied by car users who want to maintain or improve access to the city centre for private cars.

ACF: Cyclists just want decent quality, joined-up routes. As long as the Council permits these levels of car traffic we will always have congestion, air quality issues (estimated to cause 70 premature deaths in Aberdeen annually) and the other costs to society from selfish behaviour. As an example, the Aberdeen-Westhill cycle route now has an additional 5 crossing points because of the AWPR, and needless to say

road traffic has the priority at each and every one – how does that help to encourage more people to cycle? Making decent provision to allow more people to cycle safely in Aberdeen should be a no-brainer!

ACC: Politics is about outcomes and some of the benefits you describe are very long term. Unfortunately the long term view doesn't always win. Bike Ability in schools is a good example of progress and changing behaviours by influencing the next generation.

ACF: Bike Ability is good and some of our members help to deliver it. But influencing the next generation isn't good enough – how about tackling the parents dropping off children outside schools – those are the ones who need to change their behaviour.

ACC: Parking and dropping off outside schools is something we have tried to tackle but it is incredibly difficult.

ACF: Aberdeen to Stonehaven is another example of where a cycle route is desperately needed. The NCN route is very circuitous and indirect – no one commuting on a daily basis could be expected to use that.

ACC: there is a study being done on this route (Nestrans) but it is at an early stage.

ACF: Winter treatment of cycle routes seems to be badly lacking – what is ACC's policy?

ACC: There is a list of routes which are treated, these include Westhill, Shell path, Stoneywood, Cove Rd to Duthie Park, shared-use sections of Wellington Rd. But all other routes are treated as low priority and the suggestion is that if those routes have not been treated then cyclists should revert to using the road.

ACF: We disagree that it is reasonable to expect cyclists to stop using the routes provided and go back on the roads when icy – it's an absurd suggestion. Also very notable that the Deeside Way isn't on the list for priority treatment – it is one of the busiest routes in the whole city. There is also an issue with cycle routes not being inspected to see if they need to be treated – the decisions are being based on the condition of the road and not the cycle path itself. In some places poor drainage is an issue on cycle routes and leads to frequent icing which doesn't get treated because the road adjacent may be fine. Another issue on the Deeside Way is build up of leaf litter which also contributes to the route not drying out and so being more likely to be slippery.

ACF: It is 4 years since ACF presented a petition to ACC concerning the unsafe condition of the Westhill cycle route adjacent to Prime 4. When will anything be done? Also, how will the proposed Kinsford stadium development be accommodated when the proposal seems to be to encourage supporters to use the Park & Ride and walk on this route between Kingswells and Westhill. If this

happens, the route will be effectively unavailable to cyclists for a period of hours before and after a match.

ACC: If nothing has been done over this period of time the matter could possibly go back to the Committee (CH&I) to be re-considered. The application for Kingsford Stadium is currently in abeyance so not much we can say about that.

ACF: The condition of the roads in general is very poor and there are so many potholes which are a real danger to cyclists.

ACC: The Council spends a significant amount on repairing the roads and the budget is increasing. There is a 'Report it' function on the website to report any faults.

ACF: Reporting via the website generally works well and things tend to get repaired quite quickly. However we believe there is an issue with the criteria being used to determine when a pothole needs to be repaired. We believe ACC are using a depth of 50 - 60- mm as a measure. However there is national guidance which says that 25mm should be used as the criteria for defects in the path of cyclists – ACC don't appear to be using this.

ACC: We will convey that back to the relevant staff.