

Funding Advice – Sustrans

Objectives

Sustrans – the sustainable transport charity – is working with the public sector and local communities to create a new cycle route through the largest conurbation in the East of England, providing a model for partnership working. The investment has paid off, helping people in Luton and the surrounding area to get out on their bikes and become more active.

The new route is also a boon for local walkers and wheelchair users.

Where

Sustrans' work in Luton has been particularly successful. The route through the town is part of the National Cycle Network Route 6 - it links with the Sewell Greenway towards Leighton Buzzard, and includes a number of new sections of path in Luton and Dunstable.

Sustrans says there is outstanding work in Luton town centre and more construction work is planned to link Luton and Harpenden with a traffic free route during the year ahead.

How was it Achieved?

Sustrans' work in Luton – and across the country – is to plan, deliver and promote safe, accessible routes for cyclists, walkers and wheelchair users.

Most routes make use of existing paths and quiet roads, but about 30 per cent of the National Cycle Network is on traffic free trails, often using old railway lines or through private land. Sustrans will work with local authorities and landowners to buy or lease land for the network. The charity also puts up direction signs, giving destinations and distances, to promote the route to local people.

“Most towns have a cyclists’ forum, so we talk to them to help us plan the network in their area,” says Andy Knight of Sustrans. “We also try to incorporate routes that are already popular in particular areas.

“In Luton we had a great deal of support from the Borough Council and this partnership, together with feedback from the community, helped us plan the network to meet local needs.

“Half of the route we’ve created through Luton – five miles – is traffic free, with the other five miles on quiet or traffic calmed roads.”

Creating a new cycle route takes time. Andy admits it has taken five years to develop the ten mile route through Luton, from planning through to construction and completion of new parts of the route.

The other part of the project is promotion. Sue Rowe, Sustrans' Active Travel Manager in Luton, encourages use of the new routes by working with local communities.

"I set up both walking and cycling groups which meet weekly and use the Sustrans routes for their activities," says Sue. "People who haven't got bikes are loaned recycled bikes which are sourced from tips or donations. I hold themed events and sponsored rides and walks to encourage people to get on the routes and get active."

Who Was Involved?

Sustrans works on practical projects so people can choose to travel in ways that benefit their health and the environment.

The charity's National Cycle Network - which the Luton route is part of - was initiated with a Lottery grant of £43.5 million from the Millennium Commission to provide a legacy of new facilities for walkers, cyclists and wheelchair users in the 21st Century.

In November 2004 the Network received a National Lottery Helping Hands Award when it was voted by the public as their favourite major lottery-funded project.

In Luton, the charity worked with Luton Borough Council to create the new route and a local (Luton) Cycle Network around the Route 6 spine. It also had the support of its main partners, the Department of Transport, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Sport England.

The charity also worked with local cyclists and local residents to plan the route and encourage use of the new facility.

The main project team in Luton are Andy Knight, the Area Manager for Sustrans in Luton, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire and Sue Rowe, the Active Travel Manager. You can contact them at: 10, Shortcroft Court, Barton-Le-Clay, Bedfordshire, MK45 4FB; or email: andy.knight@sustrans.org.uk; telephone 01582 614644.

Sue's email is: sue.rowe@sustrans.org.uk; telephone 07887 685738.

What did it achieve?

The new cycle route through Luton – part of the National Cycle Network Route 6 – is now operational. Local people have welcomed the initiative, with a survey showing that the route was convenient and had made them more active.

Through its work with communities, Sustrans has also encouraged people in the community to look at sustainable methods of transport such as cycling and walking.

Sustrans has also helped recycle around 100 bikes and provided them to people in the community.

Comments from people involved

Andy Knight, the Area Manager for Sustrans in Luton, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, says: "The completion of Route 6 through Luton, and the associated sections of the Luton Cycle Network, provides valuable and safe links for walkers, cyclists and wheelchair users. It also facilitates our efforts to encourage more people to adopt active travel options for their employment, shopping and leisure journeys."

Sue Rowe, the Active Travel Manager for Sustrans in the area, says: “I’m getting a lot of support in the community. The first thing that happens when someone gets on a bike is that they smile. It’s immensely satisfying to encourage people to use bikes, and to help provide bikes through our bike recycling scheme, which takes disused or donated bikes and brings them back into use, loaning them out to local people.”

She started in her role in July 2005. “It’s been a great experience,” she says. “The people in the community I’ve been working with have become friends.”

Learning Points

A key issue is to keep up interest in the new cycle routes. Sue Rowe, Luton’s Active Travel Manager, has been working in particular wards for six months at a time to encourage more people to use bikes. She recycles bikes and loans them to people on low incomes.

“After I have established a walking or a cycling group in an area I move on to a new area, leaving volunteers from the community to champion our cause and keep up interest in that area,” she says.

Funding for Sue’s work – which focuses on deprived areas in Luton – has been provided by Sport England.

Sue says: “In some areas, particularly with a strong Asian population, there’s no tradition of women riding bikes. I’ve overcome this by getting a few people on side. Once one person does it, they become a role model and encourage others to join in.”

She adds: “Cycling is also thought of as an activity for young people. I’m a woman cyclist over 50. I think that helps break down those barriers having someone like me involved in the project.”

Opposition to new routes is usually low. However, there can be concerns from residents.

“Where a new route is going past someone’s house, they can have reservations,” says Andy. “For instance bike routes can sometimes attract motorcyclists and people on scooters. The problem is, if you put up barriers – or try to prevent access – you also prevent wheelchair users, wide child buggies and bikes with child trailers getting through.

“Where we have encountered these problems, we work with the local police to try to avoid illegal users becoming a problem to local people. Fortunately, as a route becomes more popular with legitimate users, then illegal use ceases”

- Get community involvement. Sustrans works with local cycle clubs and other people in the community to plan new cycle routes.
- Base yourself in the community to get the best results. Sue Rowe of Sustrans believes that to get the best results you can’t be located in a remote office. “I hot desk in the areas I’m working in, hang out with local people and have a coffee with them. They become friends. It really helps me do my job and get more people cycling and walking,” she says.
- Find community champions. The charity encourages cycle use in local areas, but tries to identify volunteers who will champion their work after their community worker has moved on.

- Use the resources of partners. Partners can help promote your core aims and objectives. In Luton, for instance, the Council was promoting cycling to young people. This work supports the creation of the National Cycle Network in the area, undertaken jointly with Sustrans.
- See the big picture. Getting people out on bikes can help people get into sport and other activities. It can also create clearer roads, cleaner air and a healthier environment. Your project may have a knock-on effect, so use this to bring in external funders, supporters and partners.
- Finally, realise that there are some things you can't change. Sue Rowe of Sustrans says: "People seem happy to walk in all weathers, but cycling is very seasonal. They don't like to cycle when it's wet."

Evaluation

Sustrans surveyed part of its route, next to the A6 New Bedford Road (halfway between Luton town centre and the northern fringe of Luton) to find out if the new cycle route had been successful.

The response was very positive, with the majority of those interviewed saying they were more active as a result of the initiative.

During a four-day period in August, September and October 2005 a total of 1,638 users (740 on the path and 898 on the pavement and roadside) were counted, and 155 interviews completed.

The survey found that:

- 64 per cent of respondents felt the presence of the route had helped them increase the amount of regular physical activity they participated in; and
- 45 per cent of respondents reported that they were walking more at the time of the survey than they were one year previously and 49 per cent were walking about the same amount; six per cent said they were walking less.

The most commonly cited influences on route users decisions to use the route were:

- the convenience of the route (52 per cent);
- personal fitness (50 per cent);
- pleasant surroundings (39 per cent);
- personal health (29%); and
- the safety of the route (19%).

There was also some support for more work in the area – with 37 per cent of respondents saying improvements to the route would encourage them to use it more often for either cycling or walking – or both.

Active Travel Manager Sue Rowe has recycled over 50 old bikes and loaned them to individuals in deprived areas of Luton. She has also donated a further 24 bikes to Beech Hill Primary School and 15 bikes to Dallow Community Centre – all to encourage people on low incomes to get into cycling.

Sue says: "It's early days yet. However, the mere fact that we've put nearly 100 bikes back into circulation must have an impact on cycling in the area."

Further Information

Visit the main Sustrans website <http://www.sustrans.org.uk/> to find out about the charity and how to become involved.

The site also has links to downloadable maps and other useful information.

To find out more about the project in Luton, contact:

Andy Knight

Area Manager

Sustrans - Luton, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire

10, Shortcroft Court, Barton-Le-Clay, Bedfordshire. MK45 4FB

E: andy.knight@sustrans.org.uk

T: 01582 614644

Luton Borough Council has also produced a cycle map, showing routes in the town.

This can be downloaded this from the Council website.

Main Contact

Sustrans - Luton, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire

10, Shortcroft Court, Barton-Le-Clay, Bedfordshire. MK45 4FB

T: 01582 614644