

A sign of the times as Aylesbury residents get on their bikes



Highlights: Nine radial Gemstone Cycle Ways into the town, with time-based signs



While Aylesbury was less experienced in promoting cycling, the County Council had an excellent track record in marketing bus travel to its residents. Cycling England was therefore interested in whether the same approach could be applied successfully to get more people on their bikes.

Many of the main radial roads into Aylesbury could be intimidating to inexperienced cyclists. While there were alternative routes, these used minor or estate roads and were either unsigned or discontinuous. Before Aylesbury was given its CDT status, there was nothing visible to give a non-cyclist the confidence that they could get around by bike in Aylesbury without having to do battle with heavy, speeding traffic.

“We are so pleased to have been awarded CDT status and it has really helped to increase our investment and priority towards cycling in Buckinghamshire, not just for the three years of the project, but when planning our medium and long-term objectives. The results of the Cycle Aylesbury initiatives are very impressive and are a testament to the hard work of Buckinghamshire County Council and Cycling England.”

Val Letheren, Cabinet Member for Transportation

Aylesbury has adopted a unique approach to tackle this. The Council has developed a network of nine colour-coded radial routes, branded with the names of gemstones. As well as being instantly recognisable, the signposts along each of the ‘Gemstone Ways’ tell cyclists how long it will take them to reach their destination - in minutes. Cyclists in Aylesbury who may be deterred by a sign which tells them it takes two miles to get to their destination are now encouraged by a sign that says it will take 10 minutes instead.



Buckinghamshire County Council obtained special authorisation from the Department of Transport to introduce this signpost branding and it is hoped that the concept will catch on across the country.

Aylesbury has also developed route-specific pocket sized cycle guides to market the Gemstone routes to local residents. The first guide – for residents living close to the Sapphire Way – led to a 24% increase in cycling.

Buckinghamshire County Council has also been improving the infrastructure along the Gemstone Ways, filling in some missing links. For example, a new cycle path across a park will provide a missing link in the 'Aqua Way' from a large housing estate at Watermead into the town centre. Aylesbury also successfully bid for an additional £3 million from the Community Infrastructure Fund to build a new cycle and pedestrian bridge across the railway. When built, this will provide the final link on the 'Pebble Way' and 'Emerald Way' into the town centre, and enable residents of a new housing development near the train station to cycle into town.

"I don't live that far away from my office but always used to drive. Since the introduction of the Aqua Way that links my house with the Town Centre I've given cycling a go. I find that I'm less stressed and I now have more energy during the day. I didn't realise it was so easy."

Michael Box, converted local cyclist

The targeted marketing of the Gemstone Ways has been supported by a town-wide promotional campaign which has included a partnership with the local radio station to play the 'Cycle Aylesbury – it's better by bike' jingle on a regular basis and the distribution of a 'Cycle Benefits' card offering discounts at local cycle shops.

Aylesbury is also an interesting case study for other towns that are in a 'Housing Growth Area'. Aylesbury is set to double in size in the next 10 years with over 20,000 new homes being built. Research shows that people are most likely to re-evaluate their travel options when they experience life-stage changes, such as moving house. With this in mind, Aylesbury CDT is working with estate agents to provide information about cycling to be included in all new home buyers' packs.

"I regularly use all of the town's cycleways for work. They just give me a fast and efficient way of accessing the town centre and other areas of Aylesbury as the connections are easy."

Mr Ludlow, an Aylesbury Postman

These initiatives appear to already be making significant impact. There are some early signs that not just avid cyclists are getting on their bikes more, but that a new group of cyclists has emerged. Nearly 11% of Aylesbury residents stated that a bike was one of their two main modes of transport in a council survey carried out in June 2007. This is compared to just 3% in 2005.

