

As Easy As Riding A Bike

Well it should be, shouldn't it?



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Why don't people cycle in Durham?

Posted on [August 14, 2013](#)

A little while ago I visited Durham for a short break. It's an attractive, small city of around 80,000 inhabitants, with a narrow, historical street pattern that precludes the use of the motor car in much of the centre. Indeed, there is [a congestion charge](#) for motorists who wish to access the Durham peninsula.

Given that there is a university here, with 16,000 students, and also that the city centre is only a short ride from much of the outskirts – no more than around 2-3 miles – the bicycle could and should be a predominant form of transport in Durham, despite the city being rather hilly.

Yet in a full 48 hours in the city, spending much of my time walking around as a tourist, I only managed to see a grand total of **seven** people using a bike. Admittedly, this was (just) out of university term time, but this is a miserable number. I saw thousands of cars being driven around the city, and only a handful of people using bikes, enough to count on my fingers.

But this is evidently not some kind of anomaly. The data I've managed to dig out on my return suggests that cycling is next to non-existent in Durham. The figure for cycling commuting share in Durham (which, remember, will be significantly higher than overall cycling mode share) was [just 1% in 2001 \[pdf\]](#), and it seems this figure has not improved in the intervening years.

[Only 0.3% of County Durham primary schoolchildren cycle to school](#), and the figure is not much better for secondary schoolchildren – just 0.7% cycle to school [cycle to school](#) (it is worth noting, incidentally, that five times more children *take a taxi* to school in this region, than ride a bike.)



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[Durham County Council's literature](#) is filled with pictures of people harrying around on mountain bikes in the countryside (see left), which is fine as a leisure pursuit, but isn't really going to do anything about changing the way everyday journeys are going to be made, and doesn't



journeys are going to be made, and doesn't

that cycling is going absolutely nowhere in the area, and has been for decades.

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Interim Cycling Strategy 2009 - 2011



that cycling is going absolutely nowhere in the area, and has been for decades.

There has, apparently, been a detailed review of the previous cycling strategy, but I can't find it anywhere on the County Durham website, and the current Cycling Strategy isn't very helpful in locating it either, listing the website for it as durham.gov.uk/xxxxxxxxxx (right). There aren't any figures for current cycling levels in Durham contained within the document, so there's absolutely no way of knowing whether cycling is increasing or decreasing. The talk in latest strategy document is encouraging (there is an acknowledgement that behaviour change programmes are unlikely to have any effect without an improvement in physical conditions), but talk is one thing, and actual progress in creating a safe, pleasant and inviting environment for cycling is another.

Another insight into how marginal cycling is in Durham comes from [this story](#) about four (yes, just four) bike lockers at Durham bus station, which remained unused for five years, because the council can't work out how to operate them. Nobody even seemed to notice!

From walking around the city, it's quite obvious to me why cycling is non-existent in Durham. The main roads I saw were dire.



There has, apparently, been a detailed review of the previous cycling strategy, but I can't find it anywhere on

a bit sexier, with some pictures of bikes with wicker baskets in amongst those of people engaging in cycle sport (although the cover again features mountain bikers and pictures of disc brakes), but there doesn't seem to be any acknowledgement

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Fast, wide and open, with absolutely no concession made for anyone daring to ride a bike. It's impossible to imagine ordinary people choosing to ride on these kinds of roads, mixing with motor traffic.

Despite delays in and out of the city, nobody appeared to have been tempted to cycle instead, to beat the queues.



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It is on these main roads that physical separation from motor traffic is desperately needed, but despite there being plenty of space available, cycle tracks (and not even cycle lanes!) were not in evidence.

Surface and multi-storey car parks [cost at least £1.40 for the minimum stay](#) (the multi-storeys rather more), but again this cost does not appear to have prompted locals to opt for cycling into the city instead.

Cycle stands were empty.

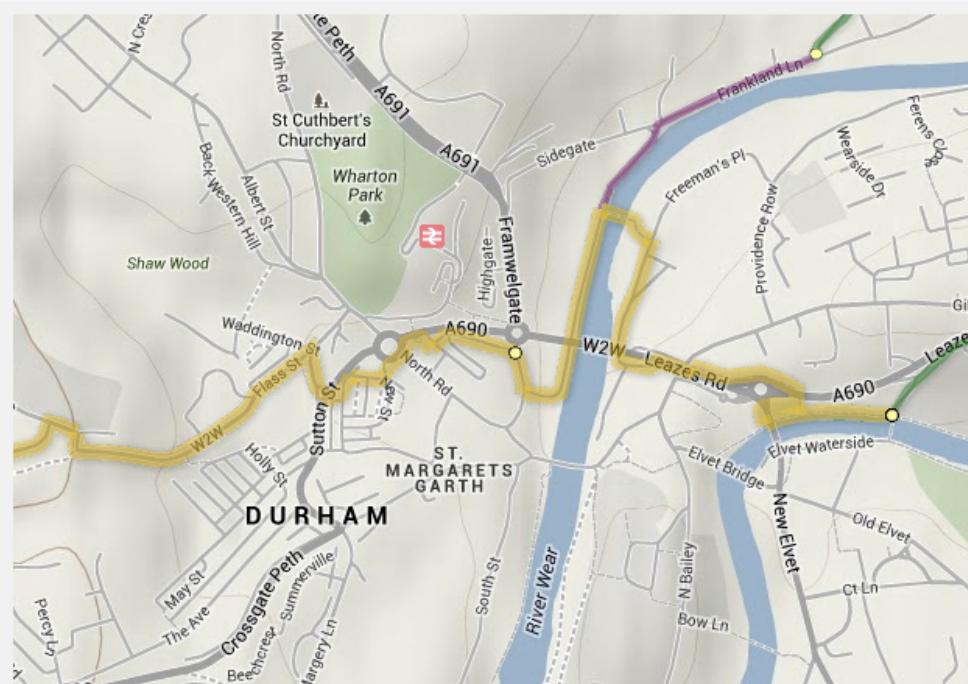
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Or littered with the sad, decaying carcasses of bikes that appear to have been there for years.



There is a Sustrans route across the city – part of National Cycle Network 14 – but to call it ‘indirect’ would be generous.



Twice the straight line distance, would you say?

Instead of crossing the large roundabout, and the main dual carriageway bridge over the River Wear (which both feature in the second photograph in the set of ‘main roads’ shown earlier) you are diverted to the south, and then several hundred metres to the north, to cross on an attractive (but rather narrow) pedestrian and cycle bridge.



Absurdly, on the second leg of this diversion (heading south back towards the city) this National Cycle Network Route becomes a one way street, with no exemptions, or cycling permitted.



People have obviously been taking to the pavement here (which is really quite wide on the other side of the road) to avoid this restriction, but the problem has been solved with a 'Cyclists Dismount' sign. Plainly there is no way road space could be reallocated on this busy street. To repeat – National Cycle Network.





If you can be bothered to get as far as the bridge, then – miraculously – a contraflow cycle lane appears out of nowhere. It is unclear how you are supposed to join it, given that you can't cycle in the road or on the pavement prior to it.

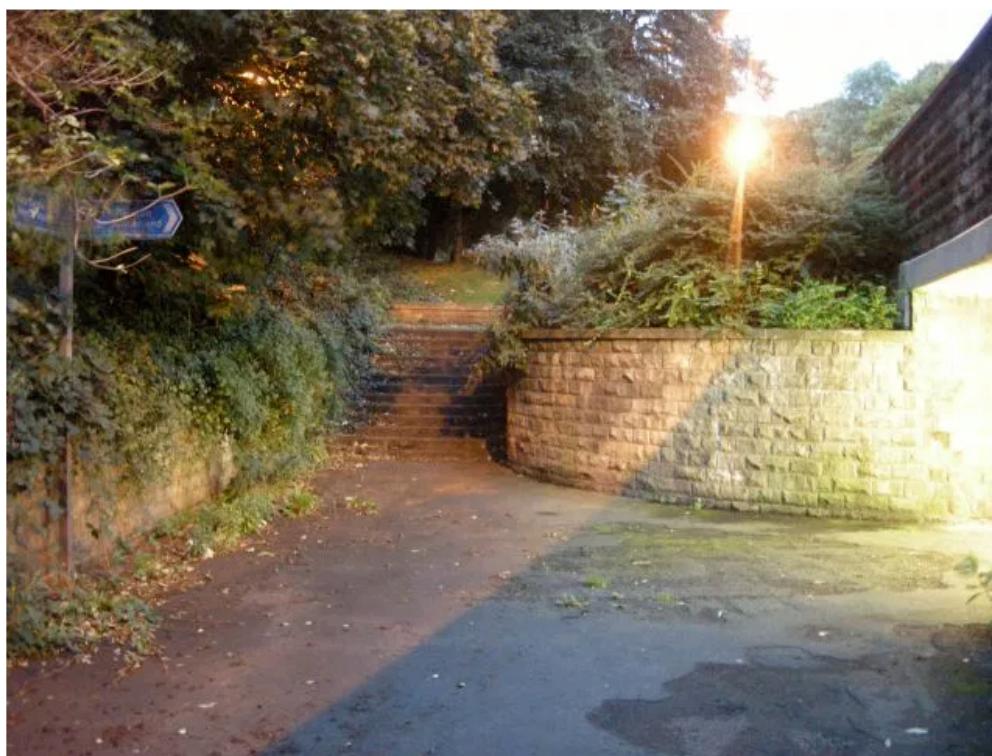


You can use it for about 50 metres, and then it promptly gives up as abruptly as it started. Dismount again!





Your 'route' then involves walking up the ramp on the right, to cross to the other side of the dual carriageway, on the bridge. NCN14 then continues on a narrow pavement, fenced off from road, before descending into a really quite scary underpass to return *back to the side of the dual carriageway you were originally on*.



So the 'traffic-free' route is circuitous, stops you cycling in many places, is narrow and unsuitable for heavy cycle flows, and is socially unsafe.

Apart from that, it's fine.

If you don't fancy doing this, then your other option is to 'man up' and cycle across the bridge, and the two roundabouts at either end.





No thanks.



Beyond forcing people who might want to cycle to choose between lethal roads and a trek that requires a map, there are many other tiny things in the city that act to make cycling unattractive.

Perfectly serviceable tracks, that become roads into the city centre, are blocked off in ways that make cycling inconvenient, like in the example pictured left.

And besides a huge number of wide one-way streets that have no exemptions or contraflows for cycling, Durham also has



motor vehicles being allowed at off-peak times.

That means HGVS can legally drive on these streets before 10am, and after 6pm, for loading purposes, but *cycling is not allowed at these times* (unless they are 'loading' perhaps?). Completely illogical.

restrictions on vehicles
accessing some streets at all
times, with no exemptions for
cycling, despite loading by



While some of these locations are probably too busy with pedestrians for cycling to be allowed at peak times, it might at least be worth a trial.



This chap – one of the seven people I saw riding bikes in two whole days – is breaking two rules; cycling the wrong way on a one-way street, and disobeying the ‘no vehicles’ restriction. However, there doesn’t seem to be any sensible reason why cycling should not be allowed on this bridge (which, incidentally, is the only other alternative to the two bridges into the city from the west that have featured already).

I don’t think it would be unreasonable to describe Durham as *institutionally anti-cycling*. I doubt the city has consciously drawn up plans to design out the use of bikes, but – unconsciously or otherwise – it seems every effort has been taken to ignore cycling, or to make it as unpleasant or as inconvenient as possible. The statistics bear out the results.

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69 Responses to *Why don't people cycle in Durham?*



Imogen says:

August 14, 2013 at 2:49 pm

I did my undergraduate degree in Durham and had hoped before I went up to be able to cycle for transport there- I grew up and learned to cycle in a town built around a hellish one-way system which meant I never got any further than the roads immediately around my house- but this illustrates exactly why I didn't. It's a truly horrible place to even consider cycling

I'm currently a postgraduate student in Exeter and while cycling facilities here are still thoroughly sub-par, it having been a cycling demonstration town means there has at least been some effort to provide for people on bikes, even if it's largely maps of “quiet routes”, blocking off a few residential streets, and a lot of shared use paths. It certainly means I can actually get around and run my errands by bike, and it means we do have a higher cycling modal share than the national average (though it's still incredibly poor). It's also telling that while the standard MAMILS and hideously impractical mountain bikes are everywhere, there are also a decent amount of people riding utility bicycles (or welded aluminium approximations thereof). Even the smallest concessions to cycling will get more people on their bikes, but some areas won't even begin to make the effort, let alone dare to dream of putting in real infrastructure and planning around cycling as a mass mode of transport.

[Reply](#)



michael says:

August 14, 2013 at 4:09 pm

Good Lord. That's just appalling. Seems pretty clear the authorities have some reason for not wanting anyone to cycle (personally I don't go in for being charitable about 'intentions' – if someone does something that any reasonable person can see would bring about a given result I'm going to assume it was deliberate).

Makes me glad to be a Londoner (and its very rare for me to say that).

[Reply](#)



Mark Goodson (@markg) says:

August 14, 2013 at 5:04 pm

I live in Cambridge and went on an OU course at Durham Uni for a week taking my bike with me as day-to-day transport. I thought it was OK to cycle around, if not very cyclist-friendly. However one key difference between Durham and Cambridge are the hills!

[Reply](#)



Rich W says:

August 14, 2013 at 9:05 pm

7 cyclists in 2 days! It's like a cycling ghost town. That's truely unbelievable in this day and age, even by British standards. I didn't know such institutionally anti-cycling places still existed in England. Durham makes London seem like a wonderful place to cycle in... although of course in reality London is far from good. But at least in London, you sense the Boroughs are trying to do something. Thanks for this informative blog.

[Reply](#)



dave lambert says:

August 15, 2013 at 9:44 am

Wow this place makes even Croydon seem cycle friendly. And that's bloody saying something.

[Reply](#)



Terry says:

August 15, 2013 at 11:40 am

'Institutionally anti-cycling' is a good term, but it's deliberate because they must be aware of the issue and yet have done nothing about it. Their own highways officers would have to know unless they are totally incompetent.

Councillors are able to get away with being anti cycling, and do it to appease the

wilder section of their electorate.

[Reply](#)



Mark Hewitt says:

August 15, 2013 at 2:13 pm

Has the author contacted Durham County Council to ask their views and give them right to reply? I do email them occasionally and they are always quick to respond, often within minutes.

[Reply](#)



Terry says:

August 15, 2013 at 4:31 pm

That would be a good idea. Send them a link to the post so they can see how they are beginning to gain notoriety. They've been named and shamed! Publish the reply, if any. I doubt they will give a meaningful response as they would have to admit there is a major problem.

[Reply](#)



Mark Hewitt says:

August 16, 2013 at 7:50 am

Their "Sustainable Transport Officer" has read the article.

[Reply](#)



congokid says:

August 15, 2013 at 3:00 pm

I've never visited Durham but it's probably just as bad as my local town, Redditch. The town centre is a mere 3.5 miles away but after moving out of London last October I've still to pluck up the courage to tackle the journey by bike. I've done a couple of weekend rides in the country and hope to put in some practice for the Palace to Palace event, but that's not quite what I had in mind when I moved here.

Apart from a 'Choose How You Move in Redditch' campaign that kicked off last year, there seems to be little in the way of a proper strategy to encourage mass cycling. Only one initiative of the 12 in the campaign mentions cycling or infrastructure and the activities and results so far are less than impressive.

One event, the Redditch Cycle Challenge, involved local people logging their cycling miles to work, on errands and recreational for a month. The outcome was 10,600 or so miles made over 510 journeys made by 53 individual cyclists and 5 local organisations which participated. Apparently the programme manager said: "Cycle fever has clearly gripped Redditch!"

I'm writing to the town and county councils to ask if they have anything more substantial in the pipeline. Not sure if it's worth writing to the local freesheets as well. Any ideas about what else I can do?

[Reply](#)

— —



Adam says:

August 15, 2013 at 7:31 pm

You Cycling Embassy of Great Britain are looking for volunteers to hand out postcards, if you fancy giving that a go. Or you could post them round the houses in your local area instead.

<http://www.cycling-embassy.org.uk/news/2013/06/28/would-you-like-to-distribute-some-postcards-for-us>

[Reply](#)



Adam says:

August 15, 2013 at 7:32 pm

Doh, silly typo. First word should have been “The...” instead of “You...”

[Reply](#)



Chris says:

August 15, 2013 at 5:39 pm

My wife did her undergrad degree at Durham and I visited the place a bit (and have worked at the hospital which is just out of town, next to a big park-and-ride site). I think the major issues are the hills and the relative compactness of the city centre. If you are trying to get somewhere that isn't either up a hill or down one (necessitating cycling back up it) then you can probably walk in a few minutes. I think that that contributes to the low numbers of cyclists historically, which then is reflected in the poor provision for cyclists in the recent changes in road layout (which is pretty horrendous even as a motorist- I have never liked having to drive into Durham).

[Reply](#)



unchainedaura says:

October 23, 2013 at 8:47 pm

it's HELL as a pedestrian, I went to college just at the top of the hill if you started walking at 7:30 you might just make it by 5 to 9 and it was only about 2 minutes away by bus. But you had to cross every single road of the demon roundabouts.

[Reply](#)



Gary Dawes (@gazza_d) says:

August 15, 2013 at 6:31 pm

Very interested to read this.

I work in Durham, coincidentally at the Hospital Chris mentioned. There are several well signed routes to the west of the city including a well used shared path (virtually all cyclists) alongside the A167 north to Chester Le Street. At that side of the city you do see people riding bikes. They just seem to avoid the city centre, which you cannot blame them for.

The city centre itself as you say is abysmal. Very little provision. I'm of the belief that it's just historical "not on the radar" mistakes, such as leaving cycles out of TROs and the usual 70/80s car-centric & car-only planning rather than any deliberate attempt to kill cycling. Millburngate bridge (the main road in your second picture past the roundabout) is horrid even when driving.

As you say the city could be a lot better with a bit of creative thinking. At the minute for cyclists it is very much a city of two halves, one on each of the East and West hilltops overlooking the Wear.

To be fair to the council they were really on the ball when the railways were ripped up & constructed lots of leisure routes. They do support cycling with the Tour Series, a series of large rides from family to the longer ones, and support a closed road Sportive in the county. Although this doesn't help people wanting to cycle across the city for transport.

[Reply](#)



SirVelo says:

August 16, 2013 at 5:58 am

Hilly? Hang on, this is Durham we're talking about; not the Himalayas! For Heaven's sake any cyclist knows (or should know) that you just stick on a cassette with bigger sprockets. Anyone with a triple chainset or a compact should have no problems around this place. Even allowing for the fact that there are hills, anyone on a bike who is moderately fit will get up the hills quicker and easier than a pedestrian of comparable fitness.

This is what David Hembrow categorises as an "Excuse for not cycling". It's an easy cop out for people, and allows them to get in their car again without feeling guilty.

[Reply](#)



AdamB says:

August 22, 2013 at 2:05 pm

"Heaven's sake any cyclist knows (or should know) that you just stick on a cassette with bigger sprockets" – yes, any cyclist should know, but it's non-cyclists who may want to cycle that we should be aiming at. How many inexperienced cycle users are going to walk into a bike shop and start specifying their own mods. Try buying a hybrid or folder (or similar utility style bike) off the shelf with granny gears. There aren't many around, and they certainly are not stocked by Durham's local bike shops (not that there even is one in central Durham any longer – the few that exist are all in the outlying villages, or in the case of Halfords, in the out of town shopping centre).

When I was looking for my folder to use around Durham as a commuter I had to look long and hard for something with a wide enough range before ending up with a combination 3 speed hub and dérailleur. The budget didn't stretch to a Rohloff. Cycle users (as opposed to cyclists) want to be able to buy something off the shelf that is suitable for their needs. It's rather a disincentive when, as has happened to me on a few occasions, people have said after trying my bike – "I might cycle if I had a bike like yours. Where can I buy one locally?" only to be told "you can't".

[Reply](#)



Richard Mann says:

August 16, 2013 at 5:43 pm

It's quite pleasant to walk around; it's pretty compact (and you can't cycle across Kingsgate bridge because of the steps, so the students all walk).

[Reply](#)



Peter Rogers says:

August 16, 2013 at 7:19 pm

Good article, although I suspect you could say the same for many more towns and cities in the UK.

The phrase "institutionally anti-cyclist" is sadly true of my local authority, North Somerset. They even turned down free central government money for cycle infrastructure which shows that it is a positive decision rather than mere forgetfulness.

<http://backwellstag.blogspot.co.uk/2013/06/no-cycling-ambition-for-north-somerset.html?m=1>

[Reply](#)



Schrödinger's Cat says:

August 16, 2013 at 9:44 pm

1% cycling rate? Yet the council and government are constantly "encouraging" and "promoting" cycling!

I wonder what the percentage of people who smoke marijuana in Durham is. I bet it's over 1% ([it's 6.6% yearly average across England and Wales](#)). Yet that's illegal!

So there's a real disconnect here. One thing is apparently supported by those in charge and yet languishes. Another thing is suppressed and yet it flourishes.

(I don't smoke it myself, by the way, but it's good for a comparison to show just how low the UK's cycling rate really is.)

[Reply](#)



T.Foxglove says:

August 17, 2013 at 4:24 pm

I live in Durham and part of the issue lies with old 'old Labour' councillors, presiding over some of the most economically deprived areas in the country who see improving access to the main regional employment areas as key to improving the lot of the people that live there but only in terms of making it easy to drive to work/shops by car (despite car ownership in these areas being well below the national average); this is exacerbated by old school transport officers who

perpetually bleat ‘no room’ or ‘too difficult’ when it comes to providing cycling infrastructure but bend over backwards to retain on street parking and rat runs for cars.

The cycling officer (who wrote the strategy) would love to provide high quality infrastructure but is virtually powerless and is cut off from decision making. They weren’t consulted over a scheme <http://tinyurl.com/ly5w2bw> for a roundabout improvement until after the Council’s response to the public consultation had been published. The roundabout improvement scheme with a budget of £750k is approximately the same as the cycling budget, which equates to £1.50/person covering an area of 1000 sq miles, the cycling officer is in an impossible position.

Following a public consultation the Council are reworking the County Durham Plan which “will guide development and change in County Durham over the next 15 to 20 years” and will be going to second public consultation in October. As the CDP mentioned cycling only six times and planned to spend over £60m building 4 miles of “relief road” through greenbelt & ancient woodland around Durham City (with the obligatory shared use path alongside) I hope they have had a complete rethink otherwise I’m moving.

[Reply](#)



T.Foxglove says:

August 17, 2013 at 5:12 pm

BTW The Cycling Officer is trying to reroute NCN14 so that it follows a more direct route through the city, including going through the stone arch with the barrier shown in the photos.

The barrier (and riverbanks & bridge that cyclists would have to cross to reach it from ‘behind the camera’) is owned by Durham Cathedral, the stone arch (a scheduled Ancient Monument) is owned by Durham University, the route of NCN 14 is “owned” by Sustrans, the cobblestone road beyond is adopted highway and leads to a World Heritage Site, any changes to the surrounding environment have to be passed via English Heritage & UNESCO and the City of Durham Trust appear to object to anything that doesn’t preserve Durham in aspic. Changing that gate to a lockable bollard appears easy but it certainly isn’t in Durham & could easily be put in the ‘too difficult’ tray but to the officer’s credit they are knocking down the obstacles one at a time and will get there eventually with this one.

[Reply](#)



Leigh de Fer says:

August 20, 2013 at 10:39 pm

I cycle virtually every day in and around Durham (commuting and for recreation, around 4,000 miles per year). Over the last 5 years I see more people on bikes in Durham than ever. I don’t have a problem getting anywhere. I agree that things could be a lot better on the infrastructure side but am aware that there’s not only a lot of positive changes planned for cycling in the city and county but there’s a desire and commitment to improve things. I think all of the negative aspects of the existing network mentioned are known about and are being looked at. ...But I also understand there are many difficulties in creating practical, affordable and sensible changes to suit us cyclists in historic city centres... it would be great to

have cycle lanes everywhere throughout the city but totally understand that it can't always be a priority or practical where there are other issues/demands. I would rather cycle through Durham over London any day (I'm not sure what some of you have been smoking). The city centre isn't brilliant (but I know there's the will to improve stuff where it is practical) but the county has a lot to offer cyclists, there are loads of quiet roads throughout, not to mention the network of Railway Paths and an increasing number of cycle paths. The Tour of Britain comes to Durham and there are a number of cycling events to have a go at. In addition, I have read the cycling strategy and think it's a pretty good and positive document (the interim cycling strategy was just that, 'interim' and is past history as far as anyone in the present is concerned),

Why don't you knock that chip off your shoulder, get a grip and do something positive (for cycling) with your time.

[Reply](#)



Terry Vaughan says:

August 21, 2013 at 10:31 am

You can get about OK, but can other people? I don't know Durham, but the difficulties of putting in bike infrastructure are often political rather than it not being practical, affordable and sensible.

[Reply](#)



T.Foxglove says:

August 21, 2013 at 1:35 pm

"...there's not only a lot of positive changes planned for cycling in the city and county..."

I disagree. Most of the infrastructure improvements planned are the conversion of footways into shared use paths, with all the inherent problems of street furniture, driveways, side roads and mixing with pedestrians unaltered. In the 10+ years I've been here I can't recall a single dedicated piece of cycle infrastructure being built in Durham City.

"...but there's a desire and commitment to improve things. I think all of the negative aspects of the existing network mentioned are known about and are being looked at. ...But I also understand there are many difficulties in creating practical, affordable and sensible changes to suit us cyclists in historic city centres... it would be great to have cycle lanes everywhere throughout the city but totally understand that it can't always be a priority or practical where there are other issues/demands."

And that is why nothing will ever change in Durham. DCC know the failings of the existing network & have a "desire" to improve it but there will always be other issues/demands which mean it isn't "practical" to do anything about it and so nothing happens. For example this picture is from the Northern Echo in 1978 about the Elvet Bridge roundabout being a dangerous road junction:

<http://dccimages.durham.gov.uk/dre/m/00778.jpg>

Look how it has changed in the intervening 35 years:

<http://goo.gl/maps/AVRge>

No doubt DCC will have wanted to improve things here but as the priority was getting as many cars and lorries through the junction as possible it wasn't practical to do anything except put in some flowerbeds and a bigger

-:--

sign.

"The city centre isn't brilliant (but I know there's the will to improve stuff where it is practical)"

You've used the killer phrase, the ultimate get out clause, "where practical" again. Can you provide a streetview link to a road in Durham City on which it is impractical to provide cycling facilities?

"but the county has a lot to offer cyclists, there are loads of quiet roads throughout, not to mention the network of Railway Paths and an increasing number of cycle paths."

Which is completely irrelevant for the people living and working in the City, as once they leave the sanctity of the poorly surfaced railway path (a shared use facility, naturally) it is back on to the main roads mixing it with traffic.

"The Tour of Britain comes to Durham and there are a number of cycling events to have a go at."

The Tour Series comes to Durham not the Tour of Britain and an enjoyable spectacle though it is, it & participatory cycling events have a negligible impact on the average person choosing to cycle as a form of transport as opposed to driving. The Great North Run has been going for 32 years and over 1m people have trained for & ran it, at least as many have lined the route cheering on the elite & ordinary runners, yet the number of people jogging to the shops or work has remained so minuscule it goes unrecorded in official statistics.

"In addition, I have read the cycling strategy and think it's a pretty good and positive document"

We are in the second year of implementation and what good and positive results have we seen from it?

"the interim cycling strategy was just that, 'interim' and is past history as far as anyone in the present is concerned"

But the review of it is relevant. If the Interim strategy failed to deliver key infrastructure improvements why was that & what will be done differently this time. As George Santayana said in his book 'Reason in Common Sense': "Those who cannot remember the past, are condemned to repeat it"

[Reply](#)



AdamB says:

August 22, 2013 at 12:58 pm

Sorry – I've been on holiday and just seen this on my return. It's interesting to see pictures of your daily commute out on the web. I live, work and cycle in Durham so feel qualified to add one or two comments.

Overall, I have to agree with your general criticism – Durham is institutionally cyclist unfriendly. To comment on the detail though:

- 1) there are more than seven of us cyclists – I reckon we must be up to at least a dozen or so now 😊

2) be careful not to confuse County Durham and Durham City when looking at the statistics. They are two associated, but separate entities (a bit like a smaller version of New York City and New York State). It's difficult to separate them and this is made even more confusing by having the same unitary authority. Even the Council forgets which it is talking about some of the time.

3) your criticism of the errors in the County Cycling Strategy is a little unfair. You've quoted from the draft plan. Perhaps you should have linked to the actual plan at

http://content.durham.gov.uk/PDFRepository/CountyDurham_CyclingStrategy2012-2015.pdf

4) The photos of cycle racks are a little unfair. Two of the three racks are on University property and are generally used almost exclusively by undergraduate students. During term time they are full. The 3rd rack, although a public one, is again predominantly used by students as it's in the middle of a University dominated area.

5) the NCN14 route is a total mess. We all know that. There is currently a project in progress to realign it into a much better and more practical route. As has been pointed out above, the World Heritage status of the peninsula (and subsequent interference by both statutory bodies and pressure groups – if they had existed in the 12th century you can be certain that the cathedral and castle would never have been built) means that everything round here moves at a snail's pace. Come back in say 10 years (as I said, things take a long time around here – I hope it will be in place within the next year but I wouldn't guarantee it) and you'll find a new route that has all its no entry signs and barriers removed.

You actually missed some of the real horror stories (e.g. the cycle lane that is blocked with a motorway style crash barrier). The Council Cycling Officer is doing a heroic job, unaided, on trying to improve things. The key problem here is that she is unaided. There is no will amongst councillors to do anything more than pay lip service to anything cycling related. (we have to have a cycling strategy? – oh well we'll reluctantly employ a cycling officer to write one – surely she doesn't expect us to implement any part of it !!!).

Durham County does not recognise the difference between leisure cycling and utility cycling. There are leisure facilities within the County (though not many within the City). This is the key problem. The Council invests in Sustrans type railway paths that are pleasant to ride on but lead from nowhere to nowhere, sportives, and closed road cycle racing, but don't think that a cycle is a useful means of transport to get from A to B. How to get the message over that bikes are transport, not toys, is the issue.

[Reply](#)



[**aseeasyasriding**](#) says:

August 22, 2013 at 2:06 pm

Thanks for the comment Adam.

I did reference the newer Cycling Strategy, which does look a lot more promising! I appreciate the bike rack photos are a bit unfair – I just didn't see any others.

Good to hear things are (slowly!) moving in the right direction; I'm hoping that once momentum builds in other cities like Manchester and

Newcastle, Durham will start to adopt similar policies.

[Reply](#)



AdamB says:

August 23, 2013 at 11:42 am

Err – you have to look hard to find the city cycle racks. The Council likes to hide what few there are well away, which is something we've been protesting about. There used to be a set in the market place but they were moved because they looked untidy and didn't mix with the vision of a clean, uncluttered area (which is now cluttered with bollards, traffic lights, traffic signs etc. in a bid to prevent motor vehicles damaging everything). They then couldn't put them in the new tucked away spot because a utility company beat them to it and installed a fibre connection box. I believe that they are currently in store in a council depot somewhere.

Cycle racks are a sore point – we don't have them because either either no-one will use them (because no-one cycles – and no-one cycles because there are no facilities...) or because too many people will want to use them and they'll become an eyesore/trip hazard/bike theft magnet. I've heard both arguments put forward simultaneously opposing the same scheme. For example, there has been a long running attempt to have some located on Palace Green near the Cathedral for use by visitors. We may get there if someone can prove that Sheffield stands were a feature of the 16th century street scene and therefore wouldn't look out of place. Until that can be demonstrated though, I'm not hopeful.

Cycling has a long way to go in Durham. The Council is starting to make the right noises, but isn't putting the resources in place to actually do anything. It's going to be a long haul

[Reply](#)



Durham Car Campaign says:

August 23, 2013 at 12:50 pm

Fortunately the cycle parking on Palace Green was knocked back, otherwise there wouldn't be anywhere for cars to park or the University to put its skips. <http://goo.gl/maps/NCfbP>

[Reply](#)



lovejoyesque says:

October 23, 2013 at 12:07 am

Or Burger Bar... <http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-bYkngOX7tfM/UiIroVz8NqI/AAAAAAAACKc/g9kKoTi6S3U/s320/Gospels+Gourmet.jpg>

[Reply](#)



Su says:

April 24, 2016 at 8:26 am

I do realise that this article and subsequent replies are now almost 3 years old, but there ARE cycle stands at Palace Green now. If you use the original link provided by Durham Car Campaign above

(<http://goo.gl/maps/NCTbp>) and swing the page round you will see a red phone box. To the right and alongside the public toilets there are around 5 stands. I know this because I regularly cycle in and park there.

[Reply](#)



roger says:

August 25, 2013 at 9:43 am

The positive is that the city actually employed someone to write a policy and work towards it – most other authorities get consultants to do this. Cycling officers need to buy the local paper where the authority advertises traffic orders, then quietly have a word with local campaigners/friendly councilors etc. Often trying to arrange hospitality at the local big cycling events can help relationships with said councilors. Same for planning applications – make sure cycling is mentioned as its no doubt in the policies but sometimes ‘forgotten’. Same for almost all local authorities, a slow but necessary process I am afraid.

[Reply](#)



platinumppt says:

October 23, 2013 at 6:27 am

Very interesting article and anything that we can do to promote cycling in our lovely city can only help all of the issues you highlight above. Have you forwarded this to DCC, as I can forward you details of a good contact who should see this?

Regards, Neil

Platinum Physiotherapy

[Reply](#)



DJ says:

October 23, 2013 at 8:32 am

Durham has adequate cycle routes outside of the city centre, I use them everyday to get to work. However, frankly Durham is too hilly for the average commuter and the city centre, by which I mean the peninsula, probably shouldn't allow any vehicles at all. Durham isn't a city built around cars. It's a walkers city, as it's so compact, which is evidenced by locals and students willingness to trudge from the city centre out to Neville's cross and Gilesgate. The lack of parking and high charges in Durham city centre deters many from driving.

[Reply](#)



DJ says:

October 23, 2013 at 8:40 am

Although I should add the routes around and leading to the peninsula are pretty hairy, I am not trying to be negative but we need to be realistic as to what can be achieved.

[Reply](#)



Matthew says:
October 23, 2013 at 4:25 pm

I live 10 km East of Durham and cycle to work pretty much every day. I'm a teacher and no one else – pupils or adults cycle to work on a regular basis. I have to say that I would love my own kids to use their bikes more often but the roads around here are solely for cars – not children on bikes. Its true that the roads are poorly maintained and your article above highlights the ridiculous road systems around the place. I'm afraid this makes me tend to do several illegal things each day and I'm not generally a law-breaker and nor do I want to be!!!

[Reply](#)



Matthew.W says:

November 11, 2013 at 12:52 pm

see the comments about the Winterton

[re. the comments about the watergate](#)

The first phase of the works to make it cyclist accessible have been completed and it's looking quite good:

<http://postimg.org/image/p1gjoc3bf>

[Reply](#)



Matthew.W says:

November 11, 2013 at 12:55 pm

PS I was too slow with my camera, otherwise I would have caught it being used by a cyclist!

PPS The rest of your comments about the infrastructure in Durham still stand though.

[Reply](#)



A.Wallace says:

November 11, 2013 at 4:23 pm

I biked down that lovely 20 metre section of tarmac on the way to work last week. It was nice! I always thought those raised cobbles were to shift water into the drainage grids so I hope you don't find the water sluicing down elsewhere now things have changed a bit. That section could be desperate in ice this winter!

Whilst I'm on it – I'd love it if there were a cycle route along the B1283 or A181 or B1198 so I could travel safely in from Sherburn. Thanks!

[Reply](#)



Andrew says:

January 12, 2014 at 1:04 pm

I love the way that this 'cycle path' has a "No cycling" sign at the (cathedral end) start of it 😊

[Reply](#)



Matthew.W says:

May 30, 2014 at 10:56 am

The sign has been updated now:

[IMG]<http://i61.tinypic.com/15s991t.jpg>[/IMG]

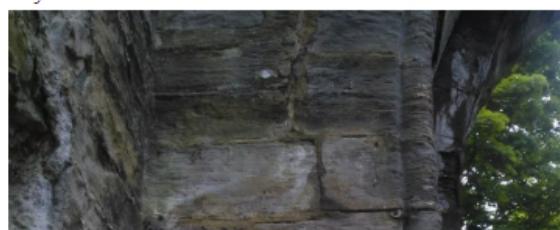
[Reply](#)



Matthew.W says:

May 30, 2014 at 10:57 am

Try it as a link instead:





[Reply](#)



jamescampbell78 says:

May 21, 2014 at 3:35 pm

I live 15 miles away from Durham and agree. Whilst some of the outskirts of Durham are pretty good for cycling, going through the city is something only to be attempted with caution. The only time I've really gone through the City centre was just after 6am on a Saturday morning. For the recreational cyclist there are far better places to ride than the City. The countryside and route into Weardale to the west of Durham is simply stunning and to the east, towards the coast there are several good cycle friendly roads with lots of challenging hills and denes.

[Reply](#)



vantheman says:

May 22, 2014 at 6:26 pm

I live about 6 miles north of Durham. Last Sunday was a glorious day so I decided to use the National Cycle Network to ride via Durham to Sunderland and back via Washington. I joined NCN7 at Langley Park, then joined NCN14 on the west side of Durham City and rode through some pleasant back streets, under the railway, then arrived at the A690, which thunders through the middle of one of the most beautiful cities in Britain. I assumed I would be able to avoid it, but I couldn't figure out how, so I joined it until I could turn right then left to go back under it to the River Wear. Then I crossed over the PennyFerry Bridge shown in the picture, then cycled illegally back under the A690 and up to Claypath, which then took me back over the A690. Down to the underpass, back under the A690 and down to the riverside path. I had not read this article at that time, and thought the whole experience was a bit bizarre. But I was looking forward to cycling along the beautiful riverside path for the first time. Only there was a diversion, which meant I had to carry my bike up a steep bank with steps, then back down the other side. Then I cycled past some beautiful gardens then out to the East on some of the best country lanes I have ever ridden on. Joined NCN1 to Ryhope, then Sunderland town centre, which was surprisingly well-signed and easy to get through off-road. Over the Wearmouth bridge and back along the river to Chester le Street.

To get to my point, this was one of the best bike rides I have ever done, except for

the strange experience of riding through Durham. I did a Google search and found an article on Wikipedia which got me to thinking about the whole philosophy of cycling in Britain:

'It is important to realise that in Dutch towns and cities, many dedicated bike routes (i.e. bike-only routes) are not alongside the roadway, nor do they run close-by and parallel to major car routes: rather, cycle routes are often completely separate from motor vehicle routes. In many cases, dedicated bike routes are far more direct than the local car routes are to common destinations, such as town centres. This complete separation of bicycle routes from motor vehicle routes is called the "unravelling of modes" and is an important feature of modern Dutch urban design and traffic management.'

David Hembrow (2 July 2012). "Unravelling of modes". A View from the Cycle Path blog. Retrieved 5 December 2013.

Here's how I interpret this policy: If Chester le Street and Durham were in Holland and I wanted to drive from one to the other, I would probably have to go via the A1. I would not be able to go via the most direct route, which is the A167, because it would be a cycle path. So the quickest way to get to Durham would be to cycle down the (traffic free) A167, with my children, in complete safety. The same article states that it was the high numbers of children being killed on the roads which led to the Dutch cycling revolution of the 1970s. Before that it was going the same way as the UK.

At present, I drive into Durham every weekday and see about 10 cyclists at most. In Holland it would be hundreds. Utopia.

[Reply](#)



Andy says:

May 22, 2014 at 6:31 pm

I'm wishing I lived in Holland now.

[Reply](#)



vantheman says:

May 26, 2014 at 6:53 pm

Well, I thought I'd try to cycle through Durham again today...This time I wanted to join NCN20 after the city and ride up through Hetton-le-Hole to Sunderland, then join NCN7 to come back along the Wear. As usual the part after Durham City was great. Well-signed, quiet roads and well-surfaced railway paths.

But the approaches and the city itself were not great. I rode down from Chester-le-Street on the shared use path which runs alongside the A167. The surface was much worse than the railway paths I rode on later. I wished I'd put less air in my tyres. Also there are a number of minor roads, pubs and driveways, which meant keeping a constant look-out for cars. The Pity Me roundabout seemed as busy as a weekday, although it was Bank Holiday Monday. I was glad to turn onto NCN14 at St Monica Drive. I went under the railway and this time came out at the right place, opposite Allergate. Then there was the previously-described, tortuous route through to the riverside.

I found out that there had been a landslip on the riverside path, so it had to be

diverted. This appears to have happened at least a year ago, so it is taking a long time to repair. Luckily (?) I found this link, which gave me an alternative route: <http://c2c.freeforums.org/w2w-closed-durham-city-t1073.html>

I didn't feel so lucky after I had made my way around the back streets of Durham. It must have taken me at least half an hour. This included carrying the bike up some steps and having to dismount to use a footbridge over Leazes Road. I didn't see another cyclist in the city.

I was struck by how much better the facilities were in Sunderland, with mostly well-surfaced and well-signed paths which did not conflict with traffic, except on one short stretch where a Chelsea Tractor pulled in front of me and parked on the on-road cycle path. Presumably the council has more cycle-friendly policies?

[Reply](#)



Peter Scott says:

June 10, 2014 at 7:59 am

Many thanks for your article which is well balanced and impartial. As a Durham resident I would have been less tolerant had I been writing something like this! A few quick points:

- the latest blight to cycling through the city is the planned bus station on what is currently North Road roundabout. I think it's a great idea to place the much-needed bus station here, but there is an almost complete absence of cycle provision in the current proposal, apart from an obvious hastily-added afterthought of a shared path. The station will still straddle four routes and the council have only made a pathetic provision for part of one route.
- I do cycle through the city on a regular basis and, as the author suggests, am forced to use the A690 Milburngate dual carriageway bridge. A lifting of the restriction via Silver Street and the old Fram bridge would be ideal, as would the proposed Prebends Bridge route. Top marks to the Council's Cycle Officer for doing everything possible – I had heard about his problems at work (and I don't know anybody who works in the Council).
- The *County* has one of the best rural cycle networks in the C2C route, and all the various additions to that in recent years. These show that politicians and planners in the region can do 'joined-up' thinking.
- If you live in the county or city don't just sit there! Contact your local councillor. I don't want to post links here but you can easily Google them.

[Reply](#)



kepbg says:

July 29, 2014 at 11:09 am

I am an undergraduate at Durham University and live full time in the city. I am also a road cyclist and compete regularly – here's my view:

- Durham is great, but tiny: students who, in Cambridge, might cycle between lectures have no need as it's a 10 minute walk from the centre of town
- Term time makes a difference: a lot of students do ride their bikes around, and bike stands are usually quite full, but Team Durham have specific bike sheds which are safer and well protected from the elements so lots of people put their bikes there instead
- Cobbles and hills: as with the first point sometimes it's easier to walk the 5

minutes than get your bike up the cobbly hills to save 1 minute overall

I agree, the lack of cycle lanes is detrimental, but cycling 5 minutes out of the city leads to beautiful roads and cycle routes.

Overall, cycling isn't huge in the city because the city is so small!

[Reply](#)



Erika says:

October 9, 2014 at 5:47 pm

Hi

I am thinking about taking pro hormones, do you think this is good idea for advanced bodybuilder like me? People are satisfied with the results after prohormones cycles, just google for – prohormones factory – worth a try?

[Reply](#)



Deb says:

October 23, 2014 at 8:30 pm

I can't believe what I am reading here, Durham City itself is only 1-2miles wide, the image that was shown right at the start is of the main road, is the only road that gets car commuters from the A167, to the A1(M), and whichever way people are travelling on it, it's highly unlikely that they'd be working in Durham City itself. The vast majority of people using this road are not people that are working in Durham City itself (as it's tiny, and therefore does not have the a huge amount of employers like most cities).

The majority of the 1-2miles is designed for pedestrians, as cycles or anything else would pose possible injuries to walkers, as the streets are very quaint, and bustling full of people.

I agree there isn't adequate provision for cycles, but that's because it's itsy bitsy tiny, there's no need, but it is also not feasible given the styling of the streets. From the market place you can take a leisurely 10min walk in any direction and you will find yourself on the outskirts of the city. There are plenty of places to park bikes, and within a 5min walk you can be at the market place, the cathedral, and other attractions.

Reading what some have wrote above is astonishing, what do you want tiny cities to do??? Cycle paths are great, but only if there is space for them.

Durham is the quaintest, most perfectly formed beautiful city. It's tininess is part of it's charm.

[Reply](#)



Johnny Bee says:

October 24, 2014 at 5:14 am

I can't believe what I'm reading Deb! With all due respect you've got to think a bit more laterally. Size really doesn't matter in this instance! However small a town is there still is no excuse for inadequate cycle provision. What you do is you put in one way streets; you ban cars from certain streets. Then you turn the space you've created into cycle paths or

pedestrian routes. As you say, Durham is small. Therefore, it should be no hardship for motorists to have their access limited to the town centre. Establish park and ride and encourage people to use their bikes/walk.

You'll be amazed how quickly the benefits will be realised once proper infrastructure is in place. We've got to get out of this mentality that car is king and that everything else is an optional extra. Start thinking from the point that cycling/walking is the norm and then you will start to see solutions are a lot easier to implement.

[Reply](#)



vantheman says:

October 24, 2014 at 8:22 am

I don't suppose there are any small, beautiful cities in Holland, are there?

[Reply](#)



Peter Scott says:

October 24, 2014 at 10:55 am

Deb – you're as entitled to your opinion as anyone else. What you're saying is that people who live in small cities don't have any entitlement to decent cycle planning which I certainly find absurd. Proportionally, as Durham city dwellers, we suffer from a large amount of traffic pollution, mainly because the council, in their wisdom many years ago, decided to put a dual carriageway route through the city.

The underlying problem is in providing better public transport (the Durham Park and Ride has been a great success and a step in the right direction), and in providing better walking and cycling facilities. The new bus station plans are typical of the current council's attitude to cycling – they don't even have the courtesy to pay lip service to it. I also heard that the Cycle Planning Officer is stifled by the main council but those of us who are property-tax payers in Durham should be making a lot more noise in this respect. It is totally unacceptable for the council to continue ignoring cycle planning in the city of Durham.

[Reply](#)



vantheman says:

November 14, 2014 at 4:17 pm

Here's a link to a blog which shows how a 750 year-old city was transformed:

<http://www.aviewfromthecyclepath.com/search/label/beforeandafter>

[Reply](#)



Tracy says:

December 2, 2014 at 8:04 am

I'm a cyclist I travel to work from Bowburn to Durham city and I park my bike opposite the gala theatre. As soon as I reach shincliff bank (bank foot) I am scared

for my life ! The trees are over hanging onto the road ,fallen branches are left on the road in which I had to swerve to miss them, drivers going pass extremely close to me. Then there's a cycling/walking path going past maiden castle as soon as you come of that path to join the cyclings part on the road ,the cars are driving on it ! It's just a whole hazard. Then to ride my bike in Durham itself ,I just stick to the paths as its to dangerous. I get pedestrians complaining ,but like I always say ,I can not run you over ! , but a car would run me over! I do not think they have designed the roads etc correctly for cyclists. Maybe if they did a questionnaire or made time to hear what improvements are needed, then it would make it a safer place.

[Reply](#)



T.Foxglove says:

January 23, 2015 at 10:18 am

If you thought it was bad before, you should see it now.

They've added centre line hatching & narrowed the uphill traffic lane, so a vehicle will either have two wheels on the hatching or two wheels in the cycle lane.

They did this so drivers have to drive in the cycle lane as too many were keeping out of the lane & scaring drivers coming the other way.

[Reply](#)



Peter says:

January 22, 2015 at 2:01 pm

I'm a cyclist...a world travelling cyclist, and just moved from Denmark near Copenhagen to Durham. The Danish Capitol is one of the worlds most cycle friendly places, with separate lanes and traffic lights only for cyclist. Therefore the bicycle is people's most wanted way of transporting themself on a day to day basis. I've certainly noticed the lack of people cycling in Durham, but I'm about to change that soon as I'm getting a bike in the coming weeks.

[Reply](#)



vanthemman says:

January 22, 2015 at 4:36 pm

Hi Peter,

Welcome to Durham, one of the most beautiful cities in Britain.

As I've said before, there are lots of good places to cycle in County Durham, but the city is not one of them unless you want to risk your life on a main road. Tracy mentioned the painted line on the road at Maiden Castle which means the lane for vehicles is so narrow that many drivers have no choice but to drive in the cycle lane. It's dangerous and I would never use it. I'll stick to the railway paths, thank you.

[Reply](#)



sacklessbiker says:

February 27, 2015 at 9:16 pm

I'm one of the few , I cycle commute to work in Gilesgate from Langley Park at various times of the day from 6am til 9pm . I've never cycle commuted elsewhere so it's difficult to judge but I go with the cars on my route , as the photos show there is a four foot steel railing right through the city centre to segregate pedestrians which trap cyclists on the road with the cars, there's no bailing out at roundabouts etc. Drivers are not considerate of cyclists because there aren't many of us.I would be lucky to see one other cyclist on my 30 minute commute.I have many helmet cam videos of close shaves and inconsiderate driving , its not for the faint hearted and any casual cyclists would be easily put off , all of my family think I'm mad especially after being hit by a car last year. I don't think anyone has really given cycle commuting any real thought at local Authority level ,they put cycle routes in where it's easy and not where they're needed. In many ways Durham City is treated as a museum piece by the Authorities rather than a place where people work and live.

[Reply](#)



shadforhandy says:

February 27, 2015 at 9:46 pm

Agreed...The council would have been better off not putting in cycle routes than adding the ridiculous ones that are there. There must have cost a small fortune and disrupted traffic for quite a while and are of very little benefit.

[Reply](#)



Carl says:

May 29, 2015 at 1:04 pm

I'm working in Durham at the moment. I thought I might be able to get out on my road bike, so I asked the people where I'm working if there was a cycling club or some such they knew of. They looked at me like I'd insulted their mothers.

[Reply](#)



T.Foxglove says:

May 29, 2015 at 1:29 pm

It didn't have one for ages, you had to travel to Ferryhill, Hetton & Bishop Auckland but now has two that I'm aware of:

Durham City Velo – <http://durhamcityvelo.com/>

Deerness Valley Cycling Club – <https://deernesscycling.wordpress.com/>

[Reply](#)



Peter Scott says:

May 30, 2015 at 10:40 am

The longest-established club nearest to Durham is Houghton:
Houghton CC: <http://houghtoncc.com/>

I am a member of Cestria CC, based in nearby Chester-le-Street and would, of course, recommend it for being very friendly:

There are also clubs at Bishop Auckland and I believe another new club (Durham Velo is brand new) at Spennymoor.

Check the websites, check facebook pages and then try each one and make up your mind. Despite your colleagues' opinions, there are plenty of like-minded people in the area.

[Reply](#)



Rob says:

July 9, 2015 at 9:08 pm

I cycled to work but use my car for everything like shopping going out to country pubs, but my bike is for work

[Reply](#)



Rob says:

July 9, 2015 at 9:09 pm

I cycle to work but use my car for everything like shopping going out to country pubs, but my bike is for work

[Reply](#)



Matthew Phillips says:

July 24, 2015 at 11:00 am

There is a petition on change.org at the moment to ask for a comprehensive cycle network for Durham. Please sign!

<https://www.change.org/p/durham-county-council-collaborate-to-produce-the-trust-pathways-in-durham-city>

[Reply](#)



Jonathan Hill says:

September 25, 2015 at 7:15 pm

Because the UK generally has completely failed to consider the bicycle as a transport option. Go to the Netherlands and see how it is done.

[Reply](#)



Alan says:

January 18, 2016 at 6:30 pm

Today 18 Jan 2016, I've just found this article and unfortunately things haven't changed... Yes they have spent a boat load more money on half brained patchwork of improvements but until people like the council member for regeneration gets out his tin box and rides around the city, he'll never have a clue what it's like to regularly ride around the city or even the county. The mish mash of non joined up cycle paths like you say are far from direct and the gaps between paths are nothing about of dangerous to all but the most experienced cyclists - even then it's no fun

short or dangerous to all but the most experienced cyclists.... even then, its no fun.

It is no surprise that there are few cyclists in the city since I totally agree that Durham County Council are short sighted, narrow minded and only interested in my opinion of getting a nice photo shoot for the press with every half baked millions of pounds spent. Institutionally anti cyclist is being rather kind.

[Reply](#)

Pingback: [Why don't people cycle in Durham? – a review – Trust Pathways](#)

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