

5 minutes with... WINDSOR CYCLE HUB

David Bonney founded Windsor Cycle Hub as a charity in 2021 to make cycling more accessible in the area. It offers free guided rides for everyone regardless of age and ability, along with a free bike repair service, from its base at The Swan in Clewer, every Saturday at 11am. Men, women and children: all are welcome, as the pedaller-in-chief explains...

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What inspired you to start the hub?

We wanted to help make cycling more accessible in Windsor, in terms of when and where. The opening of The Swan community pub in Clewer gave us a base of operations and it is perfectly located on a national cycle route.

How do you get there?

The Swan is down a road which is residents parking only, so we encourage everybody to arrive by bike. If you do need to drive, park at Windsor Leisure Centre and it's a short walk from there.

Why should people get on their bikes?

Nothing really beats exercising in nature. I personally can't understand why people go to gyms when we've got lovely rivers and trees and hills around us. The other great thing about cycling is that if you're out with other people, you can have a chat with them.

How do you support people who haven't cycled for a while?

On the first Saturday of the month we do an easy Level One ride that's suitable for everybody, from accompanied children (under 13s) upwards. We have riders aged from 8-80, but many of them are in their 50s or 60s and haven't ridden since they were 10. As the month goes on, we do more miles and more hills, so there is a steady graduation which gives people a real sense of accomplishment. If people need a bit more attention, we encourage them to come to our ride skill sessions for adults.

What's your favourite ride in the Windsor area?

I think the best thing about cycling in Windsor and surrounds is the mix of nature and history. You can be cycling along the Thames, spotting wildlife and getting plenty of fresh air, and you'll see something like the funny old Church of St Mary Magdalene in Boveney, which is packed with history. Obviously Windsor Castle and Eton College are highlights, but my favourite place is Windsor Great Park – it wins hands down.

What's the biggest challenge in getting people cycling?

Locally it's the poor cycling infrastructure in Windsor. There aren't any cycle lanes. There are shared paths – essentially pavements with a white line painted on so that pedestrians and cyclists both have an allotted space – but I can tell you, as a cyclist, they're not great. Actually they are very dangerous. Lots of our fellow residents seem to think that it's perfectly acceptable to park their cars on them, and they're often overgrown and not properly maintained.



How are you funded?

We raise funds to buy things like spare bike parts. We fix bikes for free, but we do ask for donations towards the cost, as we have to pay for tools and training, as well as the parts themselves. All of our ride leaders, for example, are trained in first aid. We also take part in the Windsor and Maidenhead Community Lottery. And we don't have any paid employees – everyone who works for us is a volunteer.

How has your vision for the hub evolved over time?

The vision has always been to help Windsor become a nicer place to live for the benefit of our mental health. We want to live in a town with a positive community and more people walking or cycling. During our first four years, we've grown better at teaching people – and at crowd management! It gets very busy on a Saturday morning.

How many people take part?

Often we have upwards of 24 people out and about riding, including our volunteers, as well as 15 or more who have come for bike repair or bike safety checks. People understand that we're a free service and they might have to wait a bit. Nevertheless, we do try to maintain professional standards and make sure that they are well looked after. We break the riders up into groups of around six to ensure that everyone gets the best out of the experience.

■ Windsor Cycle Hub opens at 11am every Saturday at The Swan, Clewer. Visit: windsorcyclehub.org