

UK Cycling Events's director Natalie Hicks, and their Logistics Manager Jo Pickering attended the meeting of Sway Parish Council on Thursday 24th August 2017 to answer questions on their Wiggle event due to come through Sway on 16th and 17th September.

Here follows my precis of the 32 minute session that started 9 ½ minutes into the meeting. Anyone wishing to review the entire session should contact me for further details.

They started by describing the route from the feed station at Bashley

Down Bashley Road, Left at the roundabout, down Sway Road, Turn Left onto Wootton Road up to Tiptoe. Right onto Middle Road, round that bend then turn Right onto Mead End Road then through a left hand onto Brighton Road then back onto the forest.

Then it went on to a Q&A session.

Q – Why choose that route?

A – We assess a route twice. For the safety point of view of our riders. We will be putting a marshal at end of Mead End Road. If there are any issues within the village they can contact that marshal.

Q – How can they contact the marshal?

A – Marshals are given a marshal briefing which has the event manager's number on. If there are any issues, the marshals are from a marshal company and they're not full employees and they are just there for the day and they will have all our information so that can be reported back

SPC comment – Good News that a marshal will be at that junction as there are people riding and walking at that corner

SPC comment – Very bad visibility to the left. I've had a number of incidents just walking with vehicles coming out so strongly do need a marshal. Been a number of close misses. It's also on one of the time trial courses and they come round there at such speed they cross to the other side of the road. Seen that quite often so do need to reconsider that very strongly.

Q – Can we have a start time please?

A – 7:20 at the event centre

Q – Have you got an estimated time for Sway?

A – First riders about 8:45.

Q – And the last ones through please?

A – 12:50

Q – and the number of riders on each day?

A – Just over 2,000 for Saturday and just under 2,000 on Sunday

Q – Do you not consider conforming to the New Forest Cycle Events Organisers' charter?

A – It's a voluntary charter. We've been working very closely with the Safety Advisory Group and the National Park and I feel we've put a lot of extra measures in over the past few years and we can deliver this event safely

Q – I'm County Councillor for vast majority of the New Forest National Park South of the A31. Can I have advance notice?

A – Absolutely

Q – Secondly more a safety matter. Bearing in mind the recent tragic death due to cyclist in London, are all the bikes properly road legal?

A – That’s the cyclist’s responsibility to make sure their bike is fit for the road. We have multiple mechanics on board if any one cyclist needs to have a safety check prior to the event but it is their responsibility.

Q – Do you insist as the organisers that they comply with the Road Traffic Act?

A – Yes it’s part of our terms and conditions that their bike, kit, helmet all have to conform

Q – But you don’t actually do an inspection?

A – No

Q – Why choose a route that takes 2,600 right through the middle of Sway particularly just 1 week after the New Forest Marathon which will have resulted in a number of road closures and traffic restrictions?

A – The number of cyclists is incorrect. We’ve never had 2,600 people riding for our event, ever.

Q – We counted that number over the two days

A – OK. What was the question again?

Q – (repeated)

A – The trouble that we have is securing feed stations so our route is based on where we can find accessible and suitable feed stations for the event. So Bashley has kindly provided the feed station so the route is down to that. I have looked at alternatives to take cyclists down the B3055 and spoke to the Safety Advisory Group this afternoon but they said it was a too busy road for the event and they thought the route we take at the moment is more suitable.

Q - Secondly there seems to be a lack of marshals along the route through Sway Parish. One you’ve kindly added and the next one that was suggested is along Mead End Road to slow down the cyclists where there are very tight bends and where the road narrows across the Avon Water.

A – Where’s Avon Water?

Q – It’s a small stream and the road as you go down Middle Road Tiptoe, turn left into Mead End Road, that road carries on down, there’s a couple of sharp bends and a hump backed bridge and a very restricted narrow area there. There’s also quite a few potholes.

A – We will look at that and assess it again and see if it’s necessary to put another marshal in there

Q – We think it is necessary

A – OK we’ll have a look as well

Q – Are you making sure your riders all have numbers both front and rear so they can be identified as you are asked to do by the National Park some time ago?

A – We agreed we would test rear numbers out so on Saturday all riders will have read numbers and Sunday they won’t.

Q – It’s a really important point. If anything goes wrong and someone needs to be identified you won’t be able to.

A – As I said, we’re prepared to give it a test on Saturday to see how effective it is. If residents feel they can identify and report accurately to us then we will see the difference won’t we.

Q – I thought you were visitors and the locals were saying what they wanted. (*something indistinct*). It seems as though you’re thinking about it the other way round.

Q – Presumably riders not starting all together. One at a time or what?

A – Small groups of 20 every 2 minutes so they should have spread out by the time they arrive here

Q – Personally think they won't have spread out much by the time they reach Tiptoe. Will need more marshalling around Mead End because of horse riders and drivers.

A – We used to send out bigger numbers and have been working closely with the National Park and councils to refine those numbers

Q – Thank you for attending this meeting. An improvement over previous years. There's an interesting comparison between you and the organisers of the NF marathon who've been engaging with parishes for several months now and they also make a fairly large contribution to local charities and good causes. Why don't you engage with parishes until the last possible moment, why don't you engage with the County Councillor at all and what contribution do you make to local charities?

A – We do send out an event plan at least 3 months prior – I think about 4 months this time around.

Q – Who do you send that to?

A – District Councils, Highways, National Park, Any Parish Councils we have on our records.

Q – We as a Parish did not receive that

A – I can check that when I get back to the office. Then once I've got all the information then I send it to Neil who acts disseminating information to the Parishes. So we do a flowchart of the flowrates and what times they're going to be affected until and all that is sent up to the parishes.

Q – Have we received that?

Clerk – normally I would circulate.

Q - I don't think we have received that. We are doing well so far. Local charities?

A – We don't currently donate something but are looking into that.

Q – Only reason for raising this is your financial accounts show operating profit over £0.5m last year and £0.75m the previous year and your turnover is over £2m a year but you make no contribution to any local charity.

A – We don't do local charity. In 2017 we donated £60k to Alzheimer's research UK

Q – 2 points of info. Contact details for every Parish Council in New Forest are on the web, and if you want to better manage the release of people – if you followed the charter with max 1,000 per day you would be much better able to manage the release of people. You could do 10 per 2 minutes instead of 20.

Comment from Neil Martin (NFALC and SAG). Info gets funnelled through him particularly the timing sheets. He then distributes to every clerk in Parish Councils across the Forest through Graham at NFALC. Particularly important as local Parishes have local information so that routes could be looked at. If there has been breakdown of communication then let him know.

Comment from Nigel Matthews NFNPA Recreation Management. Worked with 20 organisations to draft the Cycle Event Organisers' charter. It's quite good and even includes encouragement for organisers to liaise with individual parishes as appropriate. We have setup this system of communication that works across the whole of the New Forest via the Safety Advisory Group. The charter was supported by the NFNPA, NFDC, NFALC, Verderers, HCC, WiltsCC, FC and Hampshire Constabulary so a very broad support for that charter. He is keenly aware there are 2 clauses in the charter that UKCE don't always comply with – rear numbers and total riders. Have to admit and confirm that the charter is voluntary – nobody in this room

can force these guys to adhere to these clauses. They do a good job on the rest of it. He'll do all he can in a nice sort of way but cannot force them. When they trialled rear numbers at their last event from Gang Warily that was a step in the right direction. As for rate of flow – he's travelled hundreds of miles with and against the flow and his **personal opinion** is that if there are about 10 or fewer cyclists per minute on average then on most of the roads in the New Forest it's not too bad. If it goes above that it becomes more difficult. Not the fault of individual cyclists it's the organisers have the ability to control that. He has no power and at the end of the day we're in the organisers' hands to do what they think is right. He will continue to work on this.

Q to Nigel – We have a Rattler event coming through Sway this Sunday and many others. Of all those cycle event organisers, how many send out more than 1,000 per day?

A – I don't think there is any other cycle event organiser apart from UKCE that does that.

Q – Start time is 07:20. Do you have an end time for sending people out?

A – 10:40

Q - Comment from Audience member – I calculate that is about 10 per minute. You have a stream of 3-4 hours of cyclists. If they group it's even worse but common sense says that number is just too large. It is a license for somebody to get killed – maybe a cyclist or someone in a car, a horse because people swerve. Just imagine 4 hours – that's just a stream. That cannot be right. I'd have thought from some safety perspective this is an accident waiting to happen. For me 1,000 sounds about right so long as it's over a long period but not 2,000.

Q - from Audience member – Who carries the Public Liability insurance – event organiser or the cyclist? If you don't have the number of the cyclist on their back how do you make a claim?

A – UKCE hold the Public Liability Insurance. All of our events and all of our riders are covered by it.

Q – If an individual rider causes an accident does your insurance cover this?

A – It's third party public liability insurance.

Q – If you don't shut entries but can only release a certain number over the time how do you control it if there are too many entries?

A – We stop at 2,500 per day. We have a dropout of 15-20% on the day

Q – Don't really understand why putting numbers of backs of cyclists needs testing. Common sense should prevail.

Q – Forgetting the numbers which I'm horrified about, can you not arrange your event at a time that gives a bigger span of time between it and other events in the area (like the marathon)? Marathon is same time each year so should be possible to schedule around it leaving 3-4 week gap.

A – Historically had our event in September. Will look next year to see if it can change but dependant on venue and feed stations being available.

Q – On UKCE website make a big thing about cycling for health. How many travel to event from a distance in cars?

A – People travel between 60 and 100 miles to an event.

Q – So 2,500 cars driving down to the New Forest on each of 2 days and returning home again. That's not very healthy.

Q – Who pays to clean up rubbish after the event?

A – After last event in Spring we collect signage and colleagues are told if they see rubbish to pick it up. Checked again on the Monday and picked up a whole bag of rubbish. We'll continue to do that after our events.

Q – What about toilet facilities on the route. Unpleasant to see people relieving themselves and worse in public view.

A – Had issues previously on one event when couldn't obtain feed station. We put them 25-30 miles apart. Last September there was a 45 mile gap between feed stations which is where we found the problems. Have 4 feed stations on this route 25-30 miles apart. Our colleagues and marshals will be told to take note of any who are spotted urinating in public.

Q – If they are not wearing rear numbers how will marshals know who they are?

A – Some of the riders are also acting as our ambassadors and will note any infringements.

Q – *Too indistinct to comprehend* something about only taking 1.5 minutes to copy into a spreadsheet.

A – For our New Forest Events will not be publicising any more. *Something about for the Spring event .. didn't really understand the answer as could not decipher the question!*

End of session – total time about 32 minutes.

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