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Cycling's revival

With UK bike use surging since lockdown, Interim Chief Executive **Pete Fitzboydon** looks forward to a better future for cycling



It's been a rollercoaster ride. When I took over as Interim Chief Executive at the end of April, the country was still in strict lockdown. The streets were free of traffic. Shops, pubs and restaurants were closed. The skies above our heads were empty of planes.

My first week coincided with the Prime Minister returning to Downing Street after a coronavirus health scare. The pandemic was yet to reach its peak. Group cycle rides were restricted. We couldn't meet up with anyone outside of our household bubble.

It was an extraordinary period of change but also a time of hope, as cycling for exercise and wellbeing was not only permitted but actively encouraged by governments. People who'd forgotten about their bikes were rediscovering the joy of cycling. Families rode together for fun and fitness. Key workers were jumping in the saddle to avoid public transport.

Changing up a gear

The government in England announced an emergency active travel fund to encourage pop-up bike lanes. In all four nations, cycle journeys were up and, as a result, Cycling UK had never been busier. Many other charities have struggled to survive. Up to 60,000 jobs in the sector could be lost as a result of the pandemic, as could over £2bn of income.

That's a tragedy not only for those who've lost jobs or are under threat of redundancy but for all the beneficiaries of those charities. Thankfully, our membership means we're less reliant on trading, street collections, and events fundraising

I'm proud of how we've managed not only to weather the ongoing storm but to achieve so much. We launched a Big Bike Revival Scheme for key workers, making sure those who were keeping the country running had access to bikes



and the support to ride them. We've rolled out a pop-up Big Bike Revival repair scheme across England, and continue to deliver a Scotland Cycle Repair Scheme.

In August, we launched our Pumped Up campaign to encourage people to keep riding after the lockdown restrictions were lifted. In September, we put on the Worlds' Biggest Bike Ride, encouraging and inspiring tens

of thousands and showing how important cycling is for the UK. We launched King Alfred's Way, a 350km circular trail around the heart of historic Wessex. And all the while, in the background, our campaigning and lobbying work continued.

In England, the Prime Minister's vision for "a golden age of cycling" was published under the title 'Gear Change', setting out the most progressive vision for cycling in decades. Our job now is to hold them to delivering it. With local elections next year, we have a chance to demonstrate to those seeking power that the public demands the type of welcoming environment we witnessed during lockdown.

None of these achievements would have been possible without you and the powerful voice your membership gives us. That's why I was so pleased you voted in favour of our membership changes at this year's AGM. It makes our funding sustainable and gives us a great base to build on our membership numbers.

So it's with mixed feelings that I leave Cycling UK to hand over to your new chief executive, Sarah Mitchell. I'm proud of what we've achieved together over this most difficult period of our history, and glad to have been at the helm at such a pivotal moment for the charity. I wish Sarah the very best in her new role. She joins at a time when the future of cycling has never looked brighter.

Main photo: Iolize Dymond