

## *The Seven Habits of Effective Cycling Advocates*

### **1. They take the initiative wherever possible to put across the case**

Effective advocates are pro-active. For example, after a city-wide cycling event they will write about how great it was and how this shows demand for cycling and the need for more investment and enforcement of safer 20mph speeds. Let's take every opportunity to make our case, calmly and clearly, and inform, enlighten and inspire the wider public and decision-makers – both in writing and in conversation face-to-face.

### **2. They use social media**

Facebook and Twitter offer a great range and a means to connect to hundreds, potentially thousands, of people. A post on Twitter can be seen by 500 people and take very little time to do. Putting leaflets through letterboxes to reach the same number of people would take 3 hours or so.

In terms of effective reach for the time and effort and cost put in, social media wins hands down. Though let's not neglect traditional channels such as leaflets and posters, and print media.

### **3. They write to the local papers**

Because people do still read the letters pages of local newspapers! And not everyone is on Twitter or Facebook. Some people prefer a physical newspaper. The letters pages of local papers are popular and are one useful channel for putting a message out to mainstream readers – reaching 3,000 people a time.

### **4. And they write to their hyper-local newspapers too!**

Despite the boom in online big-name media, there is still a place and need for very local media. The "Voice" series in Bristol caters for such a need, as does Bishopston News. These are another channel for published letters to the editor, and for suggesting local stories. It all helps for putting the message out.

### **5. They write to their local politicians and decision-makers. And to their MP.**

In Bristol this means contacting the Mayor (Marvin Rees), the cabinet member for transport (Mhaira Threlfall) and local councillors (see the Bristol City Council website to find out their details). Politicians need to have their fingers on the pulse of local opinion and in an open and democratic society, people are free to make representations and to give their views.

They won't always agree or understand, but it at least helps to make them aware of the depth of feeling on an issue. And remember – the organised opposition is doing this! If we don't make our case, our representatives won't hear what we have to say and may miss out on knowing about important new reports etc.

Members of Parliament also want and need to know what's going on with their constituents and the issues which affect us in our part of the city. They have links to the city council and may have some sway nationally. They need to hear from you!

## **6. They use evidence and facts, but also put these in a narrative so people can understand better**

We all relate more easily to stories than to abstract facts. Our narrative is about how safer speeds make it safer and easier for people to get about by walking and cycling; about how they open up local neighbourhoods for vulnerable people and remove the fear of motor traffic; about how the city can be a better, more prosperous place if we make it people-centred, not car-centred. Think of the story you wish to tell and how it relates to people you live around and our shared humanity.

And remember, unless people care about an issue, they are highly unlikely to pay attention to it, let alone act on it. *Caring about something is always a necessary, but not a sufficient, precondition for support and action.*

## **7. Advocates persist and have patience, good humour and goodwill**

Advocacy is not easy! There are rarely any quick wins; it takes time and effort and the road can be rocky. But we must persevere in our quest. "Rome was not built in a day" and our case will not prevail overnight. We need to constantly and steadily make the case, to inform the uninformed and under-informed majority of the people, and to guide and help people.

Think of each letter, each tweet, each Facebook post, each conversation as being one brick which helps to create the eventual building. Or as one movement of the 3D printer arm which slowly helps builds the eventual creation.

We need a thick skin when we get attacked and vilified. The opponents of progressive thinking and active travel sometimes attack the person, not the idea. They can be snarky and nasty. But don't take it personally. It is a sign that they are losing when they attack the person and rant and rage. If we keep calm and focus on the issue, we will prevail. Let them have the anger – we have time, and calm common sense and goodwill will ultimately prevail. And talking to people face-to-face, and carefully listening to a person's point of view, is crucial too of course. After all, what we are calling for is all about improving everyone's lives, and what better way to inspire people than in person?