

FROM CTC'S CHIEF EXEC

EVERYONE'S A WINNER

Gold medals for cycle sport are great, but for society to win big we need investment in everyday cycling for everyone, says Paul Tuohy



CYCLING IS AN 'oven ready' solution to the UK's health challenge. The cooking instructions are simple: just add wheels!

Physical inactivity – doing less than 30 minutes of physical activity per week – is on the rise. It's the fourth largest cause of disability and disease in the UK. More than a quarter of women and a fifth of men are now classed as inactive. The estimated cost to UK taxpayers from this is £7.4 billion a year.

In 2014, Public Health England produced a report that detailed seven priorities for the next ten years to improve health and wellbeing. Physical activity is at the heart of these. I know I'm preaching to the converted, but cycling really is a great way for physical activity to become embedded in everyday life.

There is no need to pay to visit the gym. As an active form of travel, cycling (even more so than walking) is likely to raise the heart rate sufficiently to improve cardiorespiratory fitness. People who cycle regularly tend to have a fitness level equivalent to someone 10 years younger. That's why CTC members live longer than most!

While 43% of the population aged over five owns a bike, a much smaller percentage cycles regularly. So there are lots of people who own a bike but do not use it regularly or at all. CTC exists to champion cycling at all levels. As the national cycling charity, we want people to engage with cycling at any level they wish. That's why December's announcement of a Strategy for Sport by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is good news.

The strategy places an emphasis on engaging more people from every background to regularly and meaningfully take part in sport and – my emphasis – *physical activity*. There is a real focus on groups who are under-represented in sport and physical activity, including women, disabled people, those in lower socioeconomic groups, and older people.

As CTC builds its relationships with the likes of DCMS, I am keen to stress a number of ways in which we can help. The reason we



Scarborough & Ryedale Community Cycling, a CTC affiliate group

became so good at the sport of cycling and won Olympic gold medals and the Tour de France is because there was a plan and proper funding behind it. We now need the same kind of planning and funding to promote cycling as an everyday part of life.

Our near-70,000 members are more than aware of the health benefits, practicalities and joy of just riding bikes, whether it's for touring, leisure, work, school, or shopping. We now need to harness this evidence to engage with government organisations across the UK to encourage more people to embrace the wonder of one of the simplest forms of active travel: cycling.

CTC proved last year that we can excite people into taking up cycling. With funding from the Department for Transport, our Big Bike Revival project inspires people who own bikes but do not cycle regularly to start

cycling again. Through the establishment of a network of bike re-cycling centres, our campaign helps people to get their unused bikes back into working order with free bike checks, cycle servicing, and maintenance workshops, as well as led rides and cycle training.

Last year's programme reached over 57,000 people. They attended the events to have their bike 'revived', or learnt how to gain more confidence in the saddle through our newly-trained cohort of over 750 ride leaders. The greatest impact of the project was arguably among the non-regular cyclists who took part: 59% of them said that they now cycle more than they did before.

The challenge for CTC is to make sure the Government takes note of the impact cycling has on the health of our nation, so it invests in cycling – and CTC – to make it happen. ♦

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