

British Cycling Federation – Written evidence (NPS0083)

About British Cycling

British Cycling is the national governing body (NGB) for cycling as recognised by the UCI – the international federation for the sport. Based in Manchester at the National Cycling Centre, British Cycling works across all levels and eight disciplines of the sport (BMX Freestyle, BMX Racing, Cross Country Mountain Bike, Downhill Mountain Bike, Cyclo-cross, Road, Track and Cycle Speedway), from providing the support and encouragement people need to get riding their bikes for the first time, to being home to the hugely successful Great Britain Cycling Team.

British Cycling also works hard to represent cyclists' interests at all levels, including campaigning on the issues that matter to our 150,000 members. Our vision is that Together we can transform Britain into a great cycling nation.

Introduction

We welcome the Committee's call for evidence and the recognition that sport and recreation are embedded at the heart of our nation, are fundamental to the nation's health and wellbeing and that we must constantly re-evaluate our relationship with them.

Equitable access to sport and recreation is a privilege that has been denied to too many of the population over recent decades. Continuing to succeed at the highest levels of global elite competition while also enabling a more active nation is a challenge for national governing bodies like British Cycling, but we believe that we can make real changes over the next decade that can improve the lives of millions of people across our diverse nation.

1. How can local delivery, including funding structures, of sport and recreation be improved to ensure that people of all ages and abilities are able to lead an active lifestyle? For example, how successfully do local authorities and other bodies such as Active Partnerships, leisure trusts, local sports clubs, and charities work together, and how might coordination be improved?

- a. British Cycling would like to focus its response to this consultation on the importance of improvements to the built environment in encouraging and enabling more physical activity in society. It is a reality that despite a multibillion-pound leisure industry and a significant growth in the sport sector, including the incredible visibility of and access to a range of elite sports, society is nevertheless less active than it was only one generation ago. Just two generations ago only 10% of the population had sedentary jobs, today that is closer to 90%.
- b. This change has happened in part because while sport and leisure options are more available now to more people than they were 30 years ago, we have conversely created a world dominated by the

motor car. Combined with the explosion of the digital world, this has seen a dramatic decrease in the physical activity built into people's lives – which is the greatest form of accessible physical activity. This was certainly true of most lifestyles before the 1970s, when much of the working age population still combined walking, public transport or cycling to get to work, and most of their shopping and leisure trips in the days before out-of-town supermarkets were done on foot or by cycle in combination with public transport. Similarly, most children at primary and secondary school walked or cycled to school. Car ownership has been a great force for good, as it has enabled more people to access opportunities of employment and leisure that were unavailable to previous generations. But the domination of society by the motor car has gone too far.

- c. There has been a doubling in the number of private vehicles on our roads in the past 20 years. This means that most children in the United Kingdom no longer play out on local streets, no longer walk or cycle to meet friends or to explore their local neighbourhood. Most children's area of freedom has shrunk from a range of several miles from their front door, to in many cases, only a few hundred metres or none at all. This is particularly serious because it limits a child's capacity for physical activity on any given day. If we do not change the built environment and mitigate the significant impact of a car-dominated society on activity levels, for adults and children, then any interventions to improve the health and well-being of our communities through physical activity will be significantly limited.
- d. For adults, this means enabling people to build physical activity back into their day. This might be walking or cycling more for everyday trips, or it might mean an office space or workplace better designed to encourage and enable a more active life. For children this means a built environment in towns, cities and rural communities that encourages parents to give children the freedom to play and explore that they enjoyed only a generation ago.
- e. Along with many other organisations who are trying to tackle our inactivity crisis, and how that crisis impacts less affluent communities, we are worried that a sport and physical activity strategy that does not have sufficient connection to the UK's planning and transport policy will fail to bring about significant change.
- f. As a member-based organisation, British Cycling listens to our members to better understand the difficulties they face in leading an active life. Our members represent some of the most motivated and physically aware people in our society and yet even they struggle to be as active as they would like because of the fears of road safety and the limits of public access to the countryside.

2. How can children and young people be encouraged to participate in sport and recreation both at school and outside school, and lead

an active lifestyle? If possible, share examples of success stories and good practice, and challenges faced.

- a. Physical activity for children and young people strikes to the heart of a fundamental question about the accessibility of a more active life. As previously mentioned, we believe that physical activity has been designed out of our towns, cities, and rural communities. It is only by addressing these fundamental problems of access to safe, fun places to play and be physically active in an unstructured way, that we will enable new generations to lead a different life to the one too many children lead today.
- b. The challenges of a digital age erect considerable barriers to a physically active life. Rather than consider these barriers to be insurmountable, sport must embrace the digital environment. For cycling this can mean smartphone technology to help with mapping and wayfinding and creating fun and accessible ways for children to explore their community by bicycle. Access to sports facilities and equipment is a challenge which is particularly difficult in less affluent communities. Often one of the biggest barriers is transport and for those households without access to a private car any form of structured sport or physical activity and access to coaching or leadership can be out of the question, even if cost of participation is a barrier that can be addressed by the local authority.
- c. The report by Arup '[Cities Alive: Designing for Urban Childhoods](#)') sets out the barriers that children face to leading more active, happy lives, and sets out why a child-friendly approach to urban planning is a vital part of creating inclusive cities that work better for everyone. By designing for urban childhoods, governments can respond positively to the challenges of this current century. The report sets out actions that can help deliver a more child-friendly future, moving well beyond simply providing playgrounds. The vision set out in this and many other reports and policy documents clearly articulate the need for a whole system approach to enabling more active lives for our children. Nothing in this report is particularly radical or expensive but it is a direct challenge to the status quo and takes sport and physical activity policy well beyond the current remit of DCMS.
- d. The country needs bold structural policy changes to enable more children to lead a physically active life. An example of such leadership is the 2017 London-wide planning [guidance](#) on children's play and recreation. The policy, in the section of the plan that covers social infrastructure, says that '*development proposals for schemes that are likely to be used by children and young people should increase opportunities for play and informal recreation and enable children and young people to be independently mobile*', and that '*large scale public realm developments should incorporate incidental play space to make the space more playable*'.
- e. The [Children's Play Initiative](#) of 2006 is another example of a big societal attempt to change children's relationship with physical activity. This bold and innovative programme, which was sadly

discontinued in 2011, attempted to *'create, improve and develop children and young people's free local play spaces and opportunities throughout England, according to need'*. What the initiative lacked was a strong connection to parallel sport and recreation strategies despite both being initiated by DCMS. Play England should be fundamental to any future discussions about enabling young people to lead more active lives.

- f. The CIC Playing Out is an example of a community-based action group who, while having no immediate connection to sport and recreation, have highlighted the terrible restrictions placed on children's freedom today. As a parent and resident-led movement trying to restore children's freedom to play out in the streets and spaces where they live, they have made the link between a hostile local environment, parental perceptions of danger and rising inactivity, childhood obesity and poor mental health.
- g. British Cycling designed the HSBC UK Ready Set Ride learn to ride programme as a free to access resource for parents and carers of young children to empower them to teach children to pedal independently. We felt that cycling was moving away from the family and the community and becoming another sport that was coach-led. We saw a very real need to ensure that the magical 'hand off the saddle moment' stayed in the family wherever possible and was not solely the preserve of a coach or instructor. If we can provide the right free support to more parents and carers to give children a great start in a large variety of sports, then physical literacy will develop more equitably across society and the family will be fundamental to sustaining a physically active life. The great community coach is there to inspire, support, encourage and then develop those early skills for those children that aspire to take up the sport and possibly try competing. We believe that the same is true for many other sports and activities from hill walking to climbing, football and rugby.
- h. The Youth Sport Trust has highlighted the need for a new School Sport and Activity Action Plan, which we support, but any plan must be linked directly to plans to improve the lives of children outside the school day. This will be especially important as the country recovers from the Covid-19 pandemic and tries to support the millions of children (especially those from less affluent families) who have been disproportionately impacted by school closures and the inability to play with friends.

3. How can adults of all ages and backgrounds, particularly those from under-represented groups, including women and girls, ethnic minorities, disabled people, older people, and those from less affluent backgrounds, be encouraged to lead more active lifestyles? If possible, share examples of success stories and good practice, and challenges faced.

- a. Sport and physical activity policy must be developed in partnership with the communities that we want to encourage to lead a more physically active life. British Cycling's greatest success to date has been our award-winning programme HSBC UK Breeze programme,

developed in partnership with Sport England, and a cornerstone of our *We Ride* strategy which achieved its target of getting a million more women cycling over the eight years between 2013 and 2020.

- b. HSBC UK Breeze was developed from the bottom up with the support of National Lottery funding. The programme was designed and has been owned by the community volunteers themselves, known as Breeze Champions. The programme was designed to flex according to the unique needs of each community with volunteer ride leaders empowered to put on the rides that they felt best suited the community they lived in. By providing a safe space for women to gain confidence with other women like them, many thousands of people were encouraged to try cycling for the first time.

4. Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation, the Government's 2015 sports strategy, outlines five outcome priorities: physical health, mental health, individual development, social and community development and economic development. Are these the right priorities and how successful has the government been in measuring and delivering these outcomes to date?

- a. These are the right priorities. The strategy was an inspiring and visionary document, and what it highlighted was the absolute need for every large government department and the many structures of state to be equally responsible for its delivery. This has not happened as much as was hoped, and the strategy has been limited by not being driven by the whole of Government, as was the Prime Minister's intention on publication.
- b. There has not been a central body with the influence to implement the vision set out in Sporting Future. Sport England, DCMS and the Minister for Sport need the support of the Cabinet Office and the Prime Minister to bring departments together and to instigate the big conversations at the Treasury that will see budgets pulling together with a common purpose.
- c. We are concerned that the approach to measurement across the sector is lacking clearly agreed methodologies and data standards, resulting in scepticism over the accuracy of the data from Treasury officials.
- d. The lack of connectivity between DCMS and DfE on the delivery of opportunities for young people is concerning, meaning that sport and physical activity are not well measured and not prioritised in the strategic planning at a school or academy. NGBs and other delivery partners compete for recognition in schools rather than being seen as strategic partners.

5. Is government capturing an accurate picture of how people participate in sport and recreation activities in its data collection? How could this be improved?

- a. Self-reporting of levels of physical activity is open to huge error margins despite the science behind them, however the Active Lives surveys run by Sport England are rightly praised for their world-leading reporting on physical activity in England. There should however be more investment in direct data capture where possible and this will often be collected by departments far removed from sport, such as cycle counters on key transport routes. We know that there is significant geographical variation in physical activity levels and that the types of physical activity that are most prevalent are deeply dependent on the family and immediate community.
- a. There is a lack of consistency of approach across delivery partners, with misaligned data capture making a single view of people's activity levels difficult. From a funding perspective, reliance is placed on the delivery partner to capture and report data – often the agency least well placed to do so – therefore a revised, more consistent approach is needed that delivery partners can easily align to.

6. How can racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, and ableism in sport be tackled?

- a. British Cycling, like all NGBs, must be prepared to listen and reach out to those organisations who are experts in inclusion and tackling inequality, ignorance and hate in all its forms. The role of an NGB must be to disseminate that expertise to the community, while also leading the debate about the environment we want to create and putting in place the policies that will drive out intolerance from sport. The Code for Sports Governance provides a clear framework for all sports organisations to build on, and we must all then build the relationships within our own sports that deliver those gold standards of governance in our own settings. Sharing best practice across the sector will be key as well as strong relationships with the media, participants, and fans to enable change and give everyone an opportunity to change the way sports are governed.
- b. Examples of community partnership from within cycling include PRiDE Out, an inclusive, friendly LGBTQ+ cycling group. All gender identities, sexualities, ages, bikes, and abilities are welcome, including transgender, non-binary, queer, women, men, and allies who all share a love for cycling and come together to #RiDEwithPRiDE. The Black Cyclists Network and Women of Colour Cycling Group are social cycling networks that provide opportunities for people to start cycling, and supports many on their pathway into competitive levels of the sport. By supporting these sorts of community-led organisations, listening to their needs, and directing support to enable them to grow, all sports can diversify and break down the barriers to participation that have sadly marred sports participation for generations.

7. What can be done to improve and implement effective duty of care and safeguarding standards for sports and recreation activities at all levels?

- a. There should be consideration given to ring-fenced funding for all NGBs specifically to grow the safeguarding teams with responsibility for each sport. This will enable more education in the community, especially the training of club volunteers, coaches, and parents. The funding of safeguarding services should not be dependent on the size of the sport but should focus on the quality of the service offered with the sole purpose of making the lives of children, young people and the vulnerable as safe as possible when taking part in activities.
- b. In 2020 British Cycling appointed an independent member of the Board to support the Lead Safeguarding Officer in overseeing all safeguarding matters. We are pleased to say that this work has led to the NSPCC's Child Protection in Sport Unit upgrading our rating from 'satisfactory' to 'good' and recommending that our progress should be shared with other organisations.

8. What are the opportunities and challenges facing elite sports in the UK and what can be done to make national sports governing bodies more accountable? For example, accountability for representing and protecting their membership, promoting their sport, and maximising participation.

- a. The Code for Sports Governance is working, the gold standard is robust and – with support – achievable. The UK sport sector has clear guidance now about what is expected of it and a route map to achieving that world-leading standard. The Code for Sports Governance is world class and should be a source of great pride in this country, and we must work together to publicise it and promote the benefits of the changes required of sport to meet the standard. British Cycling has taken great pride in responding to the challenges within our own sport to completely overhaul our own governance structures and to ensure that the Great Britain Cycling Team and the talent programme that feeds it, will always win in the right way.
- b. Cycling in the UK is a sport without an income from television rights. The success of the Great Britain Cycling Team has been testament to the transformational success of the National Lottery in taking Team GB to second on the medal table at the Rio Olympics and Paralympics. The privilege of public funding comes with the responsibility to run an elite sports programme to the highest standard of governance and to be accountable not just to UK Sport and DCMS but to the British public.
- c. The biggest threat to elite cycling in the UK is the constriction of community sport leading to a constrained talent pool. This can manifest in several ways, the first of which is a worrying decline in the number of children learning to cycle at an early age. This is compounded by parental fear of safety on our roads limiting too

many young people from exploring by cycle and a lack of community sports facilities embedded within local communities that are maintained to a high standard, affordable to all families and promoted widely. With local authorities under the worst financial pressure, we have seen in a generation, we must see a renewed focus on central Government funding to maintain, expand and develop new community multi-sport facilities without the price of participation excluding those most in need. We believe that funding should be directed only where there is clear insight and customer data to inform delivery decisions.

9. What successful policy interventions have other countries used to encourage people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities to participate in sport and recreation, and lead more active lifestyles?

- a. The Netherlands is rightly famous for its transport cycling culture and the fact that most children are enabled to cycle to school because of five decades of investment in the world's greatest traffic-free cycle path network. What is less well known in the UK is that public health, welfare, and sport sit within the same Government department. This, along with strong links to transport and planning, has allowed the Dutch Government to develop public policy that has enabled one of the most physically active populations in the world. The Dutch have used urban planning and transport engineering as enablers for a more active population – the UK has much to learn from this approach to public health.
- b. The world's healthiest places to live do not have more gyms or a bigger private sports industry. They have a holistic approach to building physical activity into the lives of their citizens, making it easy for people to be more physically active without making conscious decisions. This is particularly true for transport policy, with these countries breaking the cycle of private car dependency for short local journeys so that active choices like walking and cycling are the quickest and easiest ones for moving around a local community.

10. Should there be a national plan for sport and recreation? Why/why not?

- a. The combined strategies of UK Sport and Sport England, Sport Scotland and Sport Wales are in essence a national plan for sport and physical activity in Britain. What is needed goes far beyond a national plan for sport and recreation. We need a method for developing public policy that ensures that each specialisation from medicine to forestry to local bus services are coordinated with the health and wellbeing of our diverse communities at the heart of evidence-based decision making.
- b. The inactivity crisis that faces the country is the direct result of planning, transport, education, business, and other decisions taken

over generations with little or no thought given to the impact on public health. This must change if we are to reverse this trend and rebuild a truly equitable and active nation. The House of Lords has a vital role to play in ensuring that every select committee, every all-party group and every public inquiry is taking account of the need to build physical activity back into people's lives. This will require bold leadership, but as a nation that prides itself on a love of sport the British public demand action so that future generations can look back on this current decade as a moment of positive change.

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