

## John Grimshaw visits Swansea

29/30 April 2009

John Grimshaw, the President and founder of Sustrans, came to Swansea to give a talk at an open meeting of *Wheelrights* on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> April. He had kindly agreed to spend all of that day and the morning of the next with us. This note is my brief account of these two days. He was stuck with me for much of his time in Swansea, so I am in a unique position to provide this record of his visit.

We didn't let him off lightly. On the Wednesday we had a City Centre ride planned for the morning and then in the afternoon a meeting with Swansea Council. In between there was an interview with an Evening Post reporter and a live interview on Swansea Sound. In the Evening he gave his talk: *Leisure and Tourism as a route back to Cycling*. This was followed on the Thursday morning by another ride, this time to the west and north of Swansea. It included an ascent of the "Swansea Alps", namely Penlan. So John couldn't complain that he had not had enough exercise, particularly as his overnight host, David Judd, had taken him (by bike) to Pwlldu beach before breakfast on that day.

I met him at the railway station at 9.00 on the Wednesday morning and took him along the shared use path on the south side of Alexandra Road and pointed out some of the issues which are causing us concern. These included the lack of warning to both motorists and cyclists of the crossings of Pleasant Street and Bellevue Road. John took photos which he uploaded onto his lap-top and later showed at the Council meeting that afternoon. These problems underline a theme which recurred during the visit, namely the need for continuity across such junctions. He later showed pictures of satisfactory solutions which involved either zebra crossings for use by cyclists or a clearly marked coloured strip across the junction.

From the City Centre we cycled to the Fabian Way *Sidings Bridge*. We went via the new extension of the coast path east from the Observatory and crossed the Tawe by the *Trafalgar Bridge* (adjacent to the Barrier). The photo shows him on this bridge. He commented favourably on the new cycle path along the south side of Fabian Way.

Then coffee in the Environment Centre and an interview with Richard Youle of the *Evening Post*.

After that Nick Guy (*Wheelrights* Chairman) drove us to *Swansea Sound's Kingsbridge studio* for a live radio interview. Mr Grimshaw, being who he is, insisted on cycling back to the Civic Centre for a 12.45 pm photo call. So as soon as the interview was over we dropped him plus bike off at Dunvant and he pedalled the six miles there along Route 4 arriving about the same time as us – spot on time for the photos.



The meeting on the Wednesday afternoon was with the *Cycling Task and Finish Group*. It's remit is to actually get things done. It was encouraging that this meeting was attended by senior people from the Council, including Reena Owen, Head of Environment, and Cabinet member Cllr Rob Speyt who chaired the meeting. Mr Grimshaw was given the opportunity to make a powerpoint presentation. In this he showed examples of proper treatment of junctions which he related to the crossings we had looked at that morning (and even showed the pictures he had taken then!) He also described his work with the 18 English Cycling Demonstration Towns and showed how the principles applied to these could be used here.

Key outcomes from the meeting were a recognition that the needs of cyclists must be considered from the outset, namely at the planning stage; also that those who do the detailed design need to be taught how to design for pedestrians and cyclists. He runs two hour training sessions for the designers in the Demonstration Towns and volunteered to do the same for Swansea. This offer was taken up with a view to these seminars being held annually. This was a positive and encouraging meeting and it has given us hope that cycling will be taken more seriously in the future.

The evening meeting in the Environment Centre went well. Attendance was close to the room's capacity of 50. And John did not let us down. Following an overview of what is happening in England and the principles being followed in the Demonstration Towns he focussed in on the subject of his talk. He pointed out how a third Heathrow runway is incompatible with an 80% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> and that it made much more sense to holiday in the UK rather than fly overseas.

The weather had been fine on the Wednesday and overnight rain should have ended by the time we ventured forth on Thursday morning, but it hadn't. He didn't let this interfere with the planned morning ride and three of us – Eifion Francis had joined John and myself – spent much of the morning looking in detail at the engineering involved in providing the missing link between Gowerton and Kingsbridge. We discovered the abutments of the bridge at the west end of the Gowerton station platform which had carried the old railway line across the existing one. The previous day, on our way to Swansea Sound, we had inspected an underpass (illustrated) under the A484 which would be perfect to take a cycle path across this road. The conclusion was that as far as the engineering is concerned the construction of this link would be straightforward.

After this we struggled up to Penlan, failing to follow *Wheelrights* planned north Swansea cycle route (my fault!), descended to the Hafod, followed the new Landore cycle path and made our way to the Dylan Thomas Centre for lunch.

Thus ended a most worthwhile two days. John Grimshaw has inspired us anew and shown us the way forward.

David Naylor  
(*Wheelright's Secretary*)

