CYCLING THE LOWER LEE VALLEY REPORT

Survey Results from LVRPA Cycling Event

The Lee Valley Hydrocitizenship team joined the cycle ride event that the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority (LVRPA) organised on World Water Day, Sunday 22nd March. The circular 25 mile guided cycle ride in the south of the park (See Appendix I for the route) and beyond, started at WaterWorks (www.visitleevalley.org.uk/en/content/cms/nature/nature-reserve/waterworks-nature-reserve-midd) with a lunch break lunch break at the Thames Barrier Park. 15 cyclists joined the ride from all levels, some of them members of the Edmonton Cycle Club, but some had never cycled in the area before nor were very regular cyclists.

There are miles of traffic-free cycling routes across the Lee Valley Regional Park covering 10,000 acres in London, Essex and Hertfordshire and cycling is one of the most popular ways of getting around, as well as a leisure activity in the area¹. Engaging with the cyclists through this event was therefore a great opportunity for the Hydrocitizenship project team and to contribute to the Word Water Day.

At the start of the ride, our project was introduced to the cyclists and they were asked to pay particular attention to water/waterscape during their ride on the day. Later on, meeting them over the lunch break at the Thames Barrier Park, they were asked to complete a short survey about their experience and reflections of the cycle ride (a significant part of the cycle route was either by the Lee Navigation canal or River) and the importance of water to them as an urban amenity (See Figure 1 and Appendix II for the questionnaire).

Figure 1: Lunch break at Thames Barrier Park and cyclists filling in survey questionnaires

The Barrier Park is also the site for the art work created by Hydrocitizenship art-practitioner, Simon Read – the Thames Profile, which was commissioned by the Countryside Commission to mark the beginning of the Thames Path at the Thames Flood Barrier. The site is a concrete wall 80 by 2.30 metres in the gallery formed by the path where it passes alongside the Barrier beneath the working area (www.simonread.info/a-profile-of-the-river-thames-from-thames-head-to-sea-reach/).

¹ See LVRPA website for more information about cycling in the Lee Valley: www.visitleevalley.org.uk/en/content/cms/outdoors/cycling
Profile of the Cyclists

A good mix of cyclists from different age, gender, location and occupation groups attended the cycling event. While all of the male cyclists were between 45-64 age group there were one ‘25-44’ and one ‘65+’ age group members among the female cyclists (Figure 1). The occupations among the group were diverse from education-related jobs to gardening, but the most significant group were ‘retired’. More than half of the group mentioned that they were regular cyclists in the Lee Valley and only two people were not accompanied by friends or family on the day. Exactly half of the group were members of Edmonton Cycling Club (ECC). A majority of the members of the ECC confirmed that they were regular cyclists in the Lee Valley area whilst non-members were not regular cyclists in the area (Figure 2).

Edmonton Cycle Club\(^2\) is a leisure cycling club based in Enfield in North London. The Club concentrate more on the social side of cycling, which includes riding mainly on towpaths, quiet country lanes and backstreets followed by lunch and coffee breaks. Throughout the year the ECC organise joint cycling events with the LVRPA, which explains the high attendance from ECC members at the event.

Half of the cyclists lived in Enfield and environs, but there were also some that travelled for this event to explore the Lower Lee Valley (Figure 3). Most of the members of ECC met at the club base first and cycled together to the WaterWorks where the ride started.

Figure 3: Postcodes of the cyclists

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\(^2\) See ECC webpage for more information about the club: http://www.edmontoncycleclub.org
While some cyclists drove to the WaterWorks and then changed into their cycling gear, some of them preferred to come on public transport and cycle from Stratford Station - which they did not find easy however. One particular cyclist complained, saying ‘(I) came via public transport from Stratford station (and) getting to the meeting place was difficult to find’.

Figure 5: Cyclists getting ready to set off at the WaterWorks car park

Cycling Experience by the River Lee and Canal

After cycling for about 2 hours through the Lower Lee Valley, the group reached the Thames Barrier Park where they had their lunch break. Participants mentioned that cycling along the canal and the river was the most peaceful part of the journey and they mostly enjoyed those areas. Some of them also mentioned Trinity Buoy Wharf (Figure 6) and Lime House as pleasant parts to cycle through.

Figure 6: Trinity Buoy Wharf (Millennium Dome in the distance)

Trinity Buoy Wharf\(^3\) is the site of London's only remaining lighthouse, situated by the confluence of the River Thames and Bow Creek at Leamouth. In the 1860s, Trinity House set up an engineering establishment at Trinity Buoy Wharf to repair and test the new iron buoys then coming into use. The Wharf continued through the twentieth century to be responsible for supplying and maintaining navigation buoys and lightships between Southwold in Suffolk and Dungeness in Kent. In 1988, the Corporation of Trinity House closed the wharf, and the area was acquired by the London Docklands Development Corporation. Today, it is a thriving centre for the arts and creative industries with over 350 community members and visitors enjoying the unique riverside location. One cyclist mentioned his

\(^3\) See Trinity Buoy Wharf webpage for more information: http://www.trinitybuoywharf.com
surprise about Trinity Buoy Wharf with the words ‘I lived and worked in London for 60 years but never knew this place existed... musical tidal machine at the Trinity Buoy Wharf was very interesting and I enjoyed that part very much’.

Most of the cyclists highlighted the peaceful experience while cycling by the green spaces, gardens, parks, and also viewing the boats by the canal and Olympic Stadium were mentioned as the parts that cyclists enjoyed the most (Figure 7).

![Figure 7: Towpath by the canal](image)

Although most of them mentioned that they enjoyed cycling along the canal, they complained that the towpath was too narrow to cycle along with people walking their dogs or jogging in a narrow path (Figure 7). One cyclist saying ‘you have to be extra careful when cycling on the towpath since it is too narrow. They need to enlarge the path to make it more enjoyable for all users’. They also highlighted the littering problem around those areas. Most of them mentioned the parts after Trinity Buoy Wharf by the river reaching the Thames Barrier Park as being very industrial, smelly and messy therefore not pleasant to cycle through.

In general, participants defined cycling by the water as ‘peaceful’ and ‘relaxing’. Only two of them mentioned that their pleasant experience did not relate to water. When cyclists were asked the importance of water to them as an urban amenity, they mainly highlighted the relaxing and pleasant feeling being close to water. One participant added ‘Everyone can enjoy it -walking/cycling/running by it- fishing/barges nature- Something for everyone.’

**Conclusion and Next Steps**

The Hydrocitizenship project is about looking at how individuals and communities relate to water and the issues associated with it; how these were dealt with in the past; current environmental concerns and conflicts and future resilience in the face of climate and urban change (in this stretch of the Lee, this means densification, intensification and population growth, including boat dwellers/river users). The Lee Valley team has started to create conversations about water in different parts of River Lee with different user groups. Joining the Cycle event organised by the LVRPA on the 22 March gave us the opportunity to kick-start the dialogue with the cyclists in the Lee Valley and create new contacts.

This study will hopefully lead to a more comprehensive survey and mapping study with the cyclists and other users (including anglers, boaters) in the Lee Valley in the future, and help us to understand what is important to people and who would like to be involved in expressing this more creatively.
APPENDIX I
APPENDIX II

World Water Day
22 March 2015
Cycle the Historic South of the Park and Beyond

1) Age

☐ 16-24  ☐ 25-44
☐ 45-64  ☐ 65 and upwards

2) Gender  ☐ Male  ☐ Female

3) Occupation: ......................................................

4) Do you cycle regularly in the Lee Valley?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

5) Are you joining this cycle ride with someone else?

☐ No
☐ Yes with family member(s)
☐ Yes with friend(s)
☐ Other (....................)

6) Are you a member of Edmonton Cycling Club?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

7) What is your home postcode?

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8) What is your email address?

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About the Cycle Ride Today
(You can use the attached map to annotate locations)

9) Which parts of the cycle did you enjoy most so far? Why?

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10) Which parts of the cycle you did enjoy least so far? Why?

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11) Does any part of this (positive/negative) experience relate to water?

If Yes, how? ..........................................................
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12) Is water important to you as an urban amenity? Why?

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Thank you for the time taken to complete this research survey.