



*Bede Island in Leicester. Wholesale redevelopment included an excellent quality riverside route and sculpture. (The railway viaduct to the left of the picture is a fragment of the former Great Central Railway.)*

### Leicester and Leicestershire

Leicester City Council also has a relatively long history of promoting cycling projects. Its first cycle track, influenced by Sustrans' Bath to Bristol project, was the Great Central Way, a four-mile railway path, started in 1981. This in turn inspired local campaign group, [Leicester Spokes](#) to prompt both Leicester City and Leicestershire County Councils to create additional links during the 1980s. These included Forest Way, the Abbey Park Cyclepath, Queen Mother's Avenue and Watermead Link, all of which now form part of the National Cycle Network.

The City Council's first cycling officer was appointed in 1985 and its first cycling strategy was published in 1993. 'We identified two quite distinct types of cyclists,' explains current Cycling Officer Sally Killips, 'and all our projects now set out to address their different needs.' The first group includes non-cyclists as well as ex-riders discouraged by road conditions. For this group, the best routes are of the early [Leicester Spokes](#) type, off-road or following quiet or calmed streets.

But, as Sally expands, 'The city also needs to help confident commuters who not only prefer to ride on the main roads but who insist on their right to be there. These riders are potentially most at risk, which is why all new road schemes in the city include advance stop lines, cycle bypasses at road narrowings and dedicated sections of cyclepath as a matter of course.' Sustrans strongly supports this two-pronged approach, not least because unless both 'camps' are happy, there is always a risk of public disagreement that can harm the interests of all involved.

Sally is also convinced of the virtues of comprehensive waymarking, not just for the sake of present cyclists but also to advertise the presence of her work to help draw new recruits. So it comes as no surprise to learn that the marvellously simple, self-adhesive, lamp-post waymarking-tape idea was invented here in Leicester.

Another notable fact of Leicestershire cycling life has proved to be the effectiveness with which voluntary groups work together. In 1993, local Friends of the Earth met Environ (the Leicester charity behind the Environment City concept) and riders from surrounding towns to consider how best to promote a cross-Leicestershire cycling route. The idea was to link a Sustrans trail from Derby on one side of the county with the Brampton Valley Way railway path on the other.

John Grimshaw arrived one September evening

and addressed the group, which also included off-duty officers of City and County Councils. Says Mark Allen, one of the prime movers, 'We knew what we wanted but needed more confidence in our ability to build. John Grimshaw soon put us on the right track.'

Since that night, with full backing from all local authorities along the way, the collaboration has diversified, regrouped and expanded to include British Waterways, the CTC, the Ramblers Association, Leicestershire Bridleways Association, several parish councils and other landowners, and more besides. Suffice it to say that the original vision now forms a most appealing section of Sustrans' Millennium Route 6, and a range of new local networks within the big Network is planned to extend to most parts of Leicestershire and beyond.

*Leicester Bede Island*

