

**Speech by David Robinson (CTC Chair)
Annual Dinner, Belfast 2008**

I am delighted, Permanent Secretary, that you have quoted George Bernard Shaw.

As a passionate cyclist his speeches at CTC AGM's were waited upon with great interest, by the assembled company. At the AGM 1898 he was even suggesting that for CTC members there should be free hotels and free bicycles.

Our great history sets a high standard for any CTC spokesperson at the best of times, but perhaps you are being a bit unfair on me asking me to follow a speaker quoting GBS in Ireland!

I have to say that **my** favourite quote is from HG Wells

'When I see an adult on a bicycle, I do not despair for the future of the human race.'

Though I did come across this one from Ann Strong which I hope the women at this dinner might appreciate.

'The bicycle is just as good company as most husbands but, when it gets old and shabby, a woman can dispose of it and get a new one without shocking the entire community.'

Firstly I would like to make some acknowledgements

Thank you Permanent Secretary and officials for support in the run up to the event, especially for the invitation from the Minister to hold the dinner at Stormont.

I would like to recognise and congratulate Belfast District Association/Member Group on achieving their 80th birthday and thank them for the work they are putting in this weekend.

I very much welcome the energy and experience of Barry Flood, the newly elected CTC councillor for Ireland

And as Kevin Mayne has said I'd like to thank our guests for coming tonight.

I would especially like to thank Sustrans and the Northern Ireland Cycling Initiative who have given great support in the run up to this event.

I am sure this brings great promise for future partnerships.

Finally I would like to reserve my biggest thanks, as ever, for Sue Cherry, our company secretary, who has been thinking about and working on this weekend for the last twelve months.

And whilst I have the floor 2009's AGM is in Chester, my home time, and is easily accessible for members from Ireland.

Permanent Secretary it really **is** great for me to back in Northern Ireland.

I say back, because almost five years ago I enjoyed a cycling trip of about 200 miles with a friend around Lough Neagh.

We followed Sustrans NCN routes 9 and 94.

We enjoyed superb hospitality and were welcomed wherever we went.

We cycled up the Lagan Valley to Moira, then on to Antrim, Ballyronan and Portadown. Our last leg back to Belfast included a visit to the nature reserve of Oxford Island.

Looking back at my notes I recorded that the weather was hot and sunny and even that we had to take a pub lunch at Gowdy's by the local racecourse, in order to shelter from the sun !

Little did I think that five years on I would be chair of CTC, responding to a permanent Secretary in Stormont at CTC's 130 annual dinner.

I'd like to say something about our vision for CTC, here and across the UK.

We share many of your views Permanent Secretary on sustainability, on health and the link between roads and the economy, and I'd like to offer some thoughts on how they all come together.

I'd like to respond to your invitation for CTC to play its role here.

I want to tell you about our vision for the coming years, especially the extension of our CTC Charitable Trust programmes to Northern Ireland.

Firstly to the potential for cycling.

Today's challenges include congestion, obesity, air quality, social cohesion, climate change – and we can tell from your speech how much these topics concern you as much as voluntary organisations.

If this was a supermarket we might say buy one, get one free. However with cycling we have the chance to buy one, and get four, five or six extra benefits free.

- * We know that cycling is a low carbon, healthy, accessible form of transport,
- * We know that it is a popular recreation and sport activity
- * We know that the public longs for the values of freedom and independence that we first experienced as children on bikes.
- * We know that when cycling levels go up cycling accidents go down.
- * We know that by creating a cycle friendly road network and promotional activity such as cycle training, we actually change the behaviour of motorists.

I believe that getting more people cycling and walking and out of their metal boxes improves community engagement and safety.

Independent economists were commissioned last year to ask if these benefits could be quantified.

They showed that support for cycling could give government a threefold pay back in as little as three years.

Other transport appraisals, especially road building usually have a 20 – 30 year pay back time.

With your emphasis on the economy permanent secretary I hope that you will have seen this appraisal.

I also hope that just as your colleagues in England and Scotland have done you might consider sacrificing just 5-10 miles of your roads programme each year to achieve stable, long term cycling funding in Northern Ireland.

And with Rod King here today please make 20mph the default speed limit for residential areas.

How can CTC help?

We recognise that we are seen as cycling's "experts".

Today we celebrate 130 years of our national organisation – the first of its kind anywhere in the world, and 80 years of our formal presence in Northern Ireland.

Over that time we have naturally accumulated a huge well of knowledge, so much of it carried within the collective memories of our volunteers.

But every day we meet other people who are as keen about cycling as we are, who have recognised that cycling is something positive for their communities.

- Teachers know that kids would love to do cycling in PE lessons, or after school clubs.
- Landowners know that mountain bikers can bring economic growth to out of the way hillsides.
- Police officers have heard about the impact of bike recycling schemes for young offenders.
- Public transport providers realise that by providing secure cycle storage they can increase their catchment area..
- Employers discover that their staff who cycle to work have less sickness, greater punctuality and don't need car parking spaces.

We have created a new language for our new advocates for cycling – we call them "champions".

CTC supports them through capacity development work for communities, professionals, members, supporters and by improving their effectiveness as advocates.

And as well as the champions we have expanded our support for individuals.

Over the last ten years we have not only grown membership we have created a whole range of cycle training activities which have resulted in significant investment from both transport and health sectors.

CTC's task is to make it as easy as possible for anyone to start or join a cycling local activity.

We are absolutely delighted that the BIG Lottery Fund in England and a range of local government and charitable partners have recognised the value of our work with a £6.5 million grant,

This is for a champions development programme which started work this spring.

And it is important to note that this was a collaboration that saw CTC and Sustrans working with our cycle racing and walking partners.

Similarly a CTC & Forestry Commission partnership is appointing a development officer to do the same work for mountain biking next month, a clear sign that this collaborative approach really works.

We also know that without CTC, cycle training would not have grown from wobbling round cones to the expert provision of health and mobility that it is today.

We have 1500 CTC approved instructors additional funding for Scotland, Wales and England has now been committed.

But our evidence tells us there is absolutely nothing about potential cyclists and cycle champions in the rest of the UK that isn't shared here in Ireland.

Permanent Secretary we welcome your extended commitment tonight to the "Cycle to Work" scheme.

We will be delighted to work with you, your officials and other champions here with activities such as cycle training and insurance to go with the new bikes.

As well as that we have just passed our first hurdle in a bid to the BIG Lottery Fund to extend our cycling champions support programme here.

Can I use tonight to encourage all of you "champions" for cycling, from the local cycle volunteer to the minister, to make sure you have expressed support for the bid by the time it goes forward in the summer.

And while things are at an early stage I hope we can build on our early constructive conversations with Harry Green and your colleagues at DOE about cycle training.

We wish to see how we can support your already extensive cycling proficiency scheme and extend its reach to families, adults, workplaces and other audiences.

We wish to support those who have already trained up as CTC approved instructors and are beginning to market themselves here as social businesses.

To conclude

Our vision for CTC, for CTC Charitable Trust and for cycling in Ireland is the same as our vision for the whole organisation.

A future in which CTC is an innovative, thriving organisation of cyclists and supporters working to promote cycling for all people.

Cycling that is accessible and safe;

Cycling that is enjoyable and functional.

Cycling that enriches lives and communities.

I hope bringing our AGM to Belfast for the first time today demonstrates the commitment of CTC's Council to you.

I hope tonight is the launch of our shared vision for cycling in Northern Ireland,.

We very much look forward to working with you all for the next 80 years.

Toast is to cycling.