

# The Fallowfield Loop: “Open-All-Barriers” Trial

Final Report for the trial of opening the barriers along the Fallowfield Loop.



Image by ©SustransNW

Prepared for: Sustrans

Prepared by: Friends of the Fallowfield Loop

Written by: Lorenza Casini

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# Executive Summary

## Objective

The key objective for this final report is to explain as well as summarise the delivery of the open barriers trial period, the activities that were undertaken during this period, the outcomes of the trial, its evaluation and key recommendations made. This report is jointly submitted by Sustrans and the Friends of the Fallowfield Loop.

The aim of this report is to provide details and knowledge about the trial, to share how it went, what changes have already been observed, how it was evaluated and what the findings and recommendations that came of it were. The report wants to provide evidence to the initial aspirations that the trial of opening the barriers was to provide an opportunity, hopefully to be long term, to make the Fallowfield Loop a green infrastructure accessible to many different people whether walking, using wheelchairs or mobility scooters or bikes that are not 'standard' (trikes, trailers, tandems, cargo bikes, family bikes etc) and that it can develop its full potential as a fantastic community asset offering a valuable means of safe, traffic-free sustainable transport.

The report provides details about the benefits observed of the trial as well as remaining risks highlighted and what strategies can be designed to remove these latent risks, if any. It also sets out the reasons and the discussions taken place on the benefit of making the barriers permanently open, for a future scenario of long term fully accessible green infrastructure to all. The report underpins the original aspiration of both Sustrans and the Friends of the Fallowfield Loop that a Fallowfield Loop without barriers along it will bring the communities it crosses closer together, rebalancing the different approaches to the barriers between more affluent and more deprived areas (traditionally seen between the West and the East sections of the Fallowfield Loop respectively).

This report is to be read in conjunction with the original **Feasibility Study** report, which can be found here: <http://bit.ly/2f2L9p3>



# Sustrans and Friends of the Fallowfield Loop (FotFL)

## **Sustrans**

Sustrans is a leading UK charity enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day. Sustrans' flagship project is the National Cycle Network, which has created over 14,000 miles of signed cycle routes throughout the UK, and although about 70% of the network is on previously existing, mostly minor roads where motor traffic will be encountered, in urban areas almost 20% of the network is free from motor-traffic<sup>1</sup>.

## **Friends of the Fallowfield Loop**

The Friends of the Fallowfield Loop have been in existence since 2001, with the overall aim of encouraging and supporting all the partners in the Fallowfield Loop route to provide and maintain a first-class community resource and to encourage its use by as many people as possible.

## **Common aims and collaboration**

Sustrans and the Friends of the Fallowfield Loop have many common aims, in the development, maintenance and enhancement of the Loop as a valuable and rich green infrastructure for all its local residents and communities it serves.

Sustrans and the Friends of the Fallowfield Loop already collaborate on many levels, whether to coordinate maintenance of the Loop, to encourage volunteers to join and enjoy the Loop as well as organise many events and activities all year round.

The wish and objective to see the Fallowfield Loop grow into an invaluable and environmental as well as transport infrastructure for a sustainable future is held highly by both parties and this feasibility study report together with the commitment towards the trial of the open barriers is testament to that.

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<sup>1</sup> The Fallowfield Loop (National Routes 6 & 60) being an example of this. <http://www.sustrans.org.uk/ncn/map/route/fallowfield-loopline>

# Summary of trial: Timeline and activities

## **Original timeline**

For the Feasibility Study report, a timeline of proposed activities was drafted and included. Volunteers from both Sustrans and the Friends of the Fallowfield Loop came together over the period April to August (2016) and organised as well as delivered a number of popular events. The activities run, among those proposed, helped promoting not only the open-barriers trial but also the Fallowfield Loop itself to many people, drawing interest and discovery by new and varied users. Since the official conclusion of the trial more events have been organised and run on the Loop such as the “Pocket Full of Treasures” art, craft and storytelling day at The Quadrants on 9 October 2016.

The image opposite shows the original timeline proposed when the Feasibility Study was issued and on the following pages this report details three main events that were held during the trial to promote the trial and an accessible Loop. Other events included: wildlife walks; regular volunteers’ task force mornings; learning to scythe as well as greening activities by Levenshulme Incredible Edible at The Quadrants.

## "OPEN-ALL-BARRIERS" TRIAL TIMELINE

**The Fallowfield Loop railway line** opened in 1892

**The line closed in 1988** and remained derelict until the late 1990s

**The Fallowfield Loop was born** as well as the Friends group in 2001. Barriers on the route were installed as request by GMP to appease security concerns regarding antisocial behaviour.

**Pre-trial Open-All-Barriers day events.** Both events were well attended with no incident 19.09.15 & 31.10.15

**We are here!** March 2016 - Barriers remain along the Fallowfield Loop with some having been added to or slightly adapted since 2001.

*Period in which to engage with stakeholders and prepare locking points for securing barriers along the Loop open*

**Open-All-Barriers Trial commences: 6 Weekends (Sun-Mon) 10.04.16 - 15.05.16**

*- Social events organised by Sustrans, FotFL and users to encourage access and discovery of the Fallowfield Loop by as many user groups as possible.*

*- Volunteers, as members of the local communities, to engage with key stakeholders of the F. Loop such as primary and secondary schools, accessed off the F. Loop, in preparation of the 3 months long opening*

**Open-All-Barriers Trial: 3 Months 22.05.16 - 21.08.16**

**Examples of events:**

*- Social bike rides*

*- Social family-friendly bike rides ("Kidical Mass" rides)*

*- After-school cycling activities, engaging local schools located along the Fallowfield Loop*

*- Breeze-rides and other commuting/leisure cycling activities to encourage the F. Loop as a sustainable transport infrastructure*

*- Walking events: Discovering The Fallowfield Loop and the wildlife it fosters*

*- Mobility events "Open-All-Access": Encouraging as many varied user groups to use and enjoy the Fallowfield Loop*

*- Share & Care events: Sustrans led events to encourage all users to share with care the Fallowfield Loop*

*- Maintenance events: FotFL led events to encourage as many people to care for, maintain and enhance the Fallowfield Loop*

**Fallowfield Loop Festival. (date TBC)** A weekend-long celebration of the F. Loop as an asset for the whole community and all users, as well as the "Open-All-Barriers" trial.

*Formal evaluation of the trial*

**Moving forward:** Beyond the trial... Maintaining a barriers-free F. Loop

## Spring Kidical Mass bike ride - 16 May 2016

During the first phase of the trial, when the barriers were opened only from Sunday morning to Monday evening for 6 consecutive weekends, one of the key events organised by a group of volunteers (local residents and cycling parents themselves) was a Spring Kidical Mass family-friendly bike ride.

“Kidical Mass” is an international movement which begun in the US in 2008, to encourage more people to cycle with their children and also to champion for better cycling infrastructure to enable safe cycling space for everyone (“8 to 80” years old). Volunteers organised the very first Kidical Mass bike ride in Manchester, which also took place on the Fallowfield Loop, in September 2015 (this is recorded in the original Feasibility Study report).

The main led-ride from the Ladybarn entrance (Fallowfield) of the Loop also had two feeder rides from:

- Stratford
- Alexandra Park

These three groups met at Ladybarn and together rode to Highfield Country Park for a picnic.

The ride was a success and it marked the beginning of the volunteers seeking feedback on the open-barriers trial. Feedback was sought via social media (Twitter and Facebook) by creating hashtags (such as #floopopenbarriers) and a dedicated email was also set up: [floopopenbarriers@gmail.com](mailto:floopopenbarriers@gmail.com)



Poster made by Eve Francis and Anna Smith for the Kidical Mass ride.

We hope to start running these rides every month to help campaign for a permanent opening of the barriers along the Loop to better enable family and disability access to the cycleway - please spread the word!





Photos taken on the Kidical Mass ride.  
(Images (c)Anna Smith and Lorenza Casini)

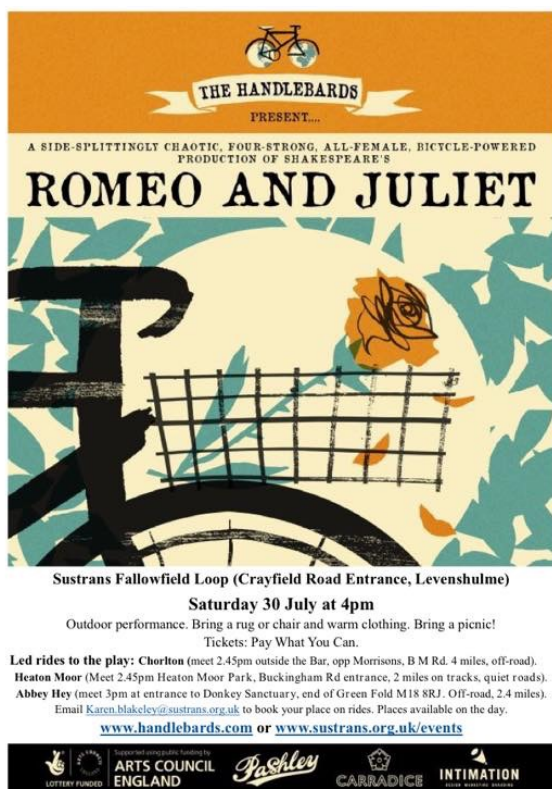


## The Handlebards “Romeo & Juliet” - 30 July 2016

The Sustrans NW team together with Sustrans and FotFL volunteers organised and delivered a fun, vibrant and successful open-air theatre event, by inviting a traveling theatre company “The Handlebards” to perform their touring “Romeo and Juliet” play at The Quadrants on the Fallowfield Loop.

The day and the event was a real success, bringing many people onto the Fallowfield Loop, some who although were local residents, were not familiar with the Loop.

Some of the volunteers led bike rides to the Quadrants to encourage as many people to cycle to the event and local co-operative Coffee Cranks also offered support by bringing along their coffee cargo bike.



Images: Poster (c)TheHandlebards; Photos (c)Lorenza Casini



## "Open All Access" - September 2016

On 11 September 2016 as a way to celebrate the end of the trial and to host an access event, members of the group Simply Cycling from Longford Park with their adapted bikes together with other local users, owners of other type of bikes, were invited to the Loop for a photo shoot by Sustrans NW.

A morning spent exchanging stories of how the open-barriers trial enabled improved accessibility and thus enjoyment of the Loop.

Sustrans published an article about the trial using photos from this event, which can be found here:  
<http://www.sustrans.org.uk/news/disability-groups-celebrate-open-access>



Images  
©Sustrans NW



# Evaluating the trial

Throughout the trial volunteers from Sustrans and the FotFL, who have been championing and coordinating the trial with many of the planned activities, encouraged feedback from the outset in the form of emails (to the dedicated email address) and via social media platforms such as Facebook local groups (for example the Friends of the Fallowfield Loop group) and Twitter.

At the completion of the trial, a survey was designed and then undertaken by members of the FotFL. The survey was undertaken physically over a Sunday and a Monday (14 and 15 August 2016, at both the Quadrants and St. Werburgh's entrances/exits to the Fallowfield Loop) to interview both leisure as well as commuting users and it was also made available online for a three weeks period.

The findings were analysed and discussed at length, finally summarised in an initial report which was issued to Sustrans and was also published online on the FotFL website (12 September 2016), which can be found here: <https://fallowfieldloop.org/2016/09/12/summary-of-responses-to-the-open-barrier-survey/>

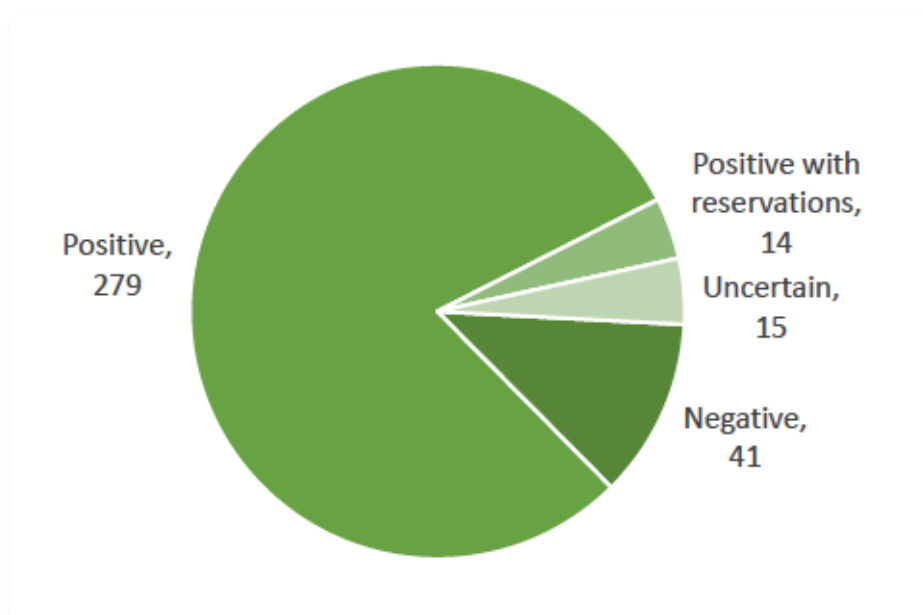
The findings are included here for record and for future reference.



## The findings

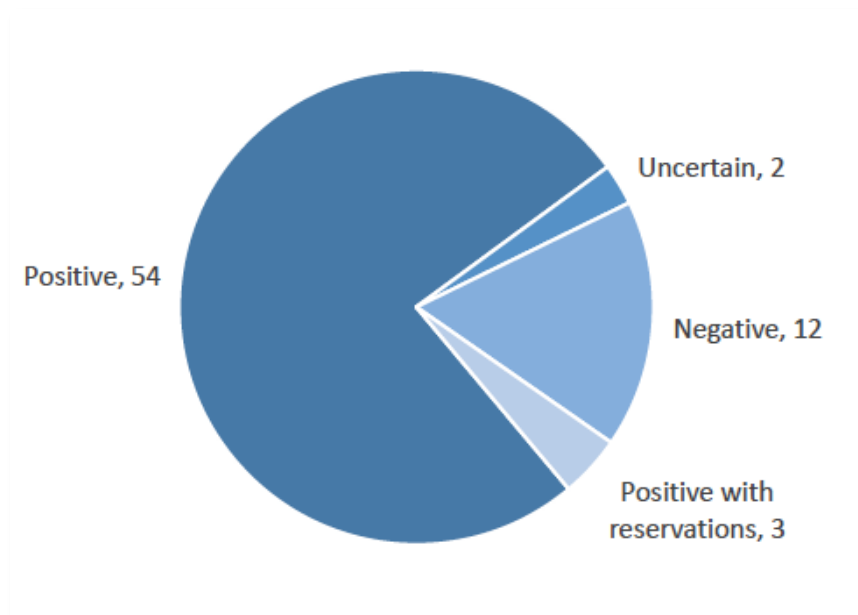
The Friends of the Fallowfield Loop (FotFL) conducted three separate surveys: physical (144 respondents), online (134) and via email, Facebook and Twitter (71). Together they formed an impressive compendium of opinions about the Loop as well as the open barrier trial.

### Overall summary



The pie chart above represents all the responses received collated together. The positive responses made it clear how the trial had been received by users. Of the 41 negatives, the following data summarise the breakdown:

- 12 from email / Twitter / Facebook:
  - 11 motorbikes
  - 1 burglary
- 10 from physical survey:
  - Motorbikes / speeding cyclists / bunching cyclists
- 19 from online survey:
  - 2 had not noticed barriers had been opened
  - 3 gave no further comment
  - 6 were concerned about motorbikes
  - 5 were concerned about speeding cyclists
  - 2 were concerned about speeding cyclists & motorbikes
  - 1 was concerned about a speeding maintenance van



Feedback via social media platforms were specifically collated by Lorenza Casini and Giselle du Toit throughout the trial period. An email dedicated to the feedback was set up ([floopopenbarriers@gmail.com](mailto:floopopenbarriers@gmail.com)) and hashtags were set up on Twitter (#floop #openbarriers).

The following data also show that the majority of responses were again positive and several responses specifically mentioned that the open barriers meant easier use with trailers / panniers / baby seats / tandems / recumbents / tricycles or wheelchairs, or indeed for those learning to ride a bike.

- *"It has bothered me that these barriers obstruct normal use by families. I've witnessed a man with child on towbar having problems lifting bike through, which seems so unfair. Not to mention that they are not safe for learner riders to negotiate".*

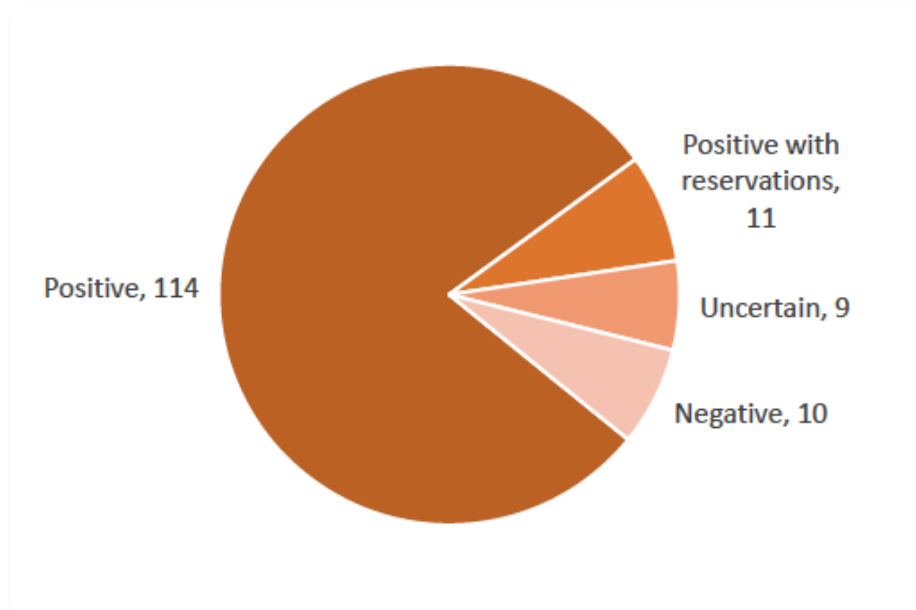
1 positive response mentioned that opening the barriers made for safer use of the Loop at night, due to not having to stop to dismount.

Of the 3 positive with reservations, one did not state the reservations, just commented that he had some. The other 2, one was concerned about motorbikes (as he had encountered them previously when the barriers were closed), the other wondered if the open barriers were connected to the spate of bike muggings.

Of the 12 negative responses, 11 related solely to motorbikes. The final response (5th Aug 2016) linked increased burglaries from houses backing on to the Loop in the last three months to the open barrier trial.

2 of the negative responses also did not seem to realise that there were any potential benefits to opening the barriers – one agreed that "no doubt for cyclists clipped in on cleats they'll think it's great to avoid slowing down" and another (from someone who uses the Loop on a bike) "Please note that I never have any problems negotiating the permanent obstacles".

## Physical survey



A handful of members of FotFL, coordinated by David Beetham (Secretary) and Dick Venes (Treasurer), volunteered to be on the Loop on a Sunday and a Monday over a set number of hours to talk to various users of the Loop and undertake a physical survey. This happened on 14 and 15 August 2016, at both the Quadrants and St. Werburgh's entrances/exits to the Fallowfield Loop.

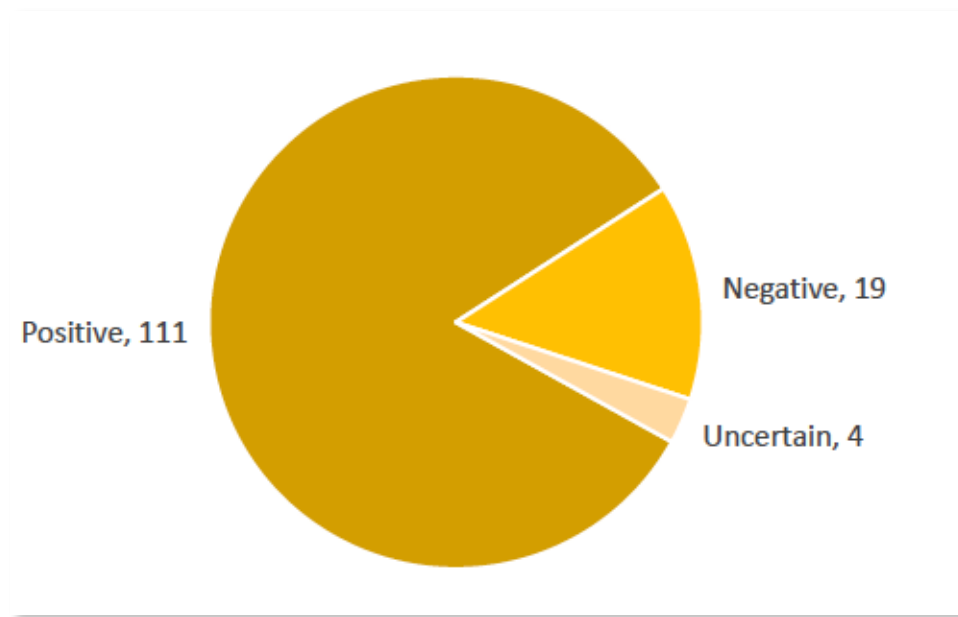
The volunteers spoke to cyclists, walkers, dog walkers. People of various ages, male and female, some with children.

The negatives/uncertain were evenly split between faster riders ('lycra fanatics', 'please get them to slow down') and incidence of motorbikes.

The positive comments were limited to one-liners, as to be expected from a physical survey when people were keen to get on with their ride/walk. Here is a selection:

- It is much easier with a trailer bike
- Seen many more riders commuting
- Use much more as hate stopping and starting on a bike
- Feel safer as am more vulnerable to harassment when stopping at a barrier
- I'm unbalanced when going through the twists at the barriers
- Easier for young children to learn cycling
- The existing structures with open barriers separate walkers from cyclists
- Barriers are all different, not of a common type, which is confusing
- Quicker to get to my job interview
- Traffic-free commuting is marvellous
- We are able to use the tandem with children
- It is possible now for buggies to use the Loop
- Makes for a much easier ride

## Online survey



The online survey was arranged and coordinated by two key members of FotFL: Giselle du Toit and Julian Fox. This was set up on the SurveyMonkey website and was online for one month period. It was originally only envisaged the online survey would be live for two weeks, but the response was so positive that it was decided to extend for a further two weeks.

The negatives/uncertain was primarily made up of

- Motorbike / quad bike concern (9)

*"Have definitely seen and heard more motorbikes on the loop. Have nearly been knocked over by one once, hear them at night as my garden backs onto the loop. It's nice being able to cycle straight through the barriers, but I'm not sure it's worth the additional noise and risk of having motorbikes on sections of the loop that are not intended for them."*

- Speeding bicycle concern (9)

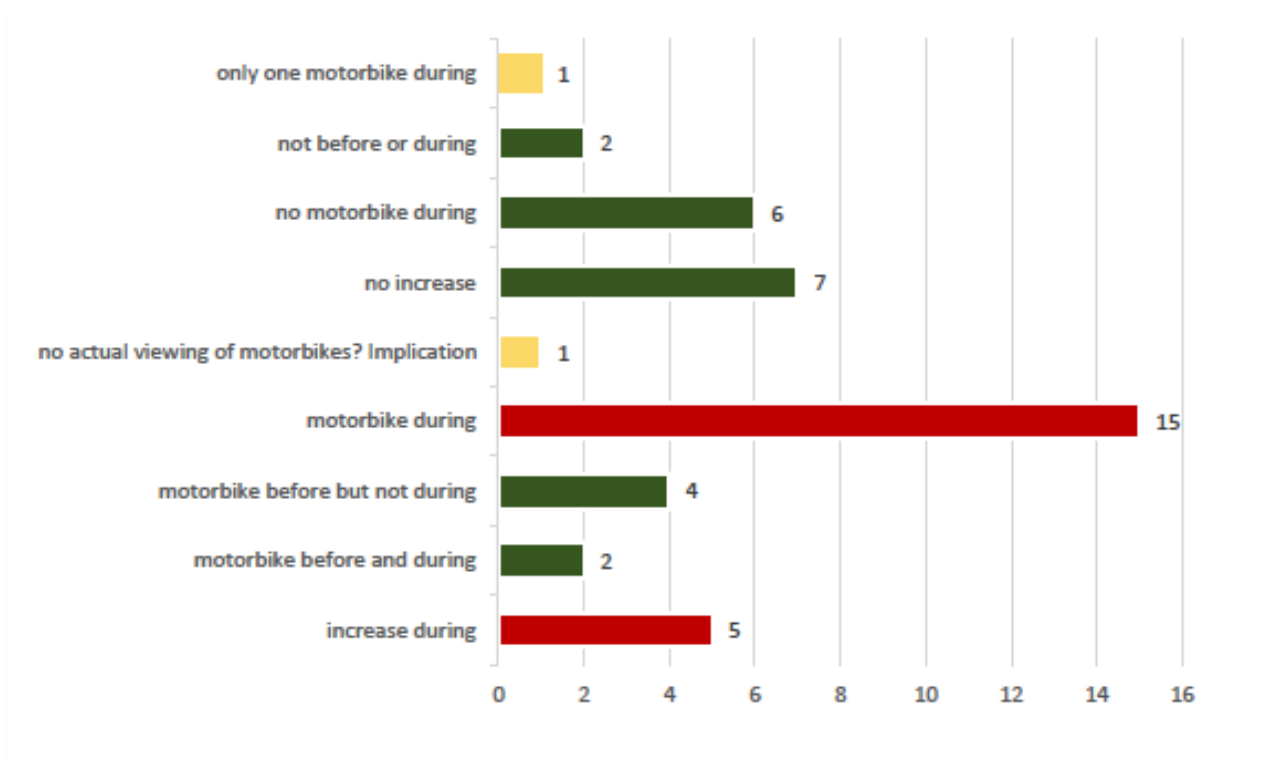
*"Unfortunately it encourages many cyclists (and I am one!) to speed along the loop putting other users at risk as they don't slow down for pedestrians and expect everybody to get out of their way."*

The positive comments were varied, including:

- 56 respondents stated their journey was quicker, easier or more pleasant. The majority of these were people cycling, but a few people stated that running was now more pleasant or that they could now use the Loop with buggies / prams.
  - *"Much easier to use especially when pushing the pram."*
  - *"As a runner the awful design if the barriers makes running on the loop a real challenge when it should be something to be enjoyed."*
- 18 respondents mentioned now being able to use a special bike (recumbent, trailer, tricycle, cargobike, bakfiets) or wheelchair.

- *"I cycle with a friend who uses a recumbent bike as he has disabilities. He can't use the loop when the barriers are closed so it has made a huge difference to him, me and friends and family he rides with."*
  - *"I can use the loop more often get places easier and safer. Before the barriers made it near impossible to use a safe route as my trailer for kids is too big."*
  - *"I use the Loop numerous times a day now & have witnessed a real increase in cargo bikes with families enjoying the use of the resource. I have also been delighted to see wheelchair users utilising the Loop which of course they wouldn't have been able to before. I haven't seen a single motorbike on the path since the trial began - ironically I saw more last summer when the gates were very much shut."*
  - *"My daughter has severe autism and so is unable to cycle. Therefore I currently tow her on her tricycle having the barriers open make accessing the loop much easier."*
- 13 respondents stated they were using the Loop more because the barriers were open, eg
    - *"When I first used the FLoop prior to the barriers being opened, I didn't return for a good year or so. After my first visit back, on finding the barriers open, I started cycling to and from work (Levenshulme to Openshaw) three times a week."*
    - *"Since the barriers have been open I have used almost daily for commuting by bike. Previously having to use the gates was a hassle and it was simpler to use the roads. In addition to this I now also use it on my bike with my children as getting through the gates with a trailer / baby seat was near impossible and not worth the trouble of having to stop every few hundred yards to lift over or maneuver the gates."*
  - 7 respondents felt that open barriers made the Loop safer, due to both not having to slow down (and potentially dismount) at the barriers, or through increased use of the Loop.
    - *"I feel safer with the barriers open as I do not have to slow down/stop to get through them. As a female cyclist, this makes me feel more comfortable, especially at night, and with the reported attacks on the loop."*

## Motorbike summary



While the overall majority of responses to the trial were positive, with a greater number coming from cyclists (of all transport type, age, gender and with or without children), we felt important to analyse and summarise the number of responses that mentioned concerns with regard to (illegal) motorbike users.

Of those respondents who mentioned motorbikes in the electronic responses, those who mentioned only motorbikes during the trial or who noted an increase are marked red in the top graph.

Yellow denotes an uncertain response: one respondent noted 'only' one motorbike and another implied that motorbike gangs were linked to burglaries in the area, but did not mention seeing any such motorbikes (or any motorbikes) on the Loop.

In total, across the three mode of survey (physical, social media and online survey), 43 comments mentioned motorbikes, of which:

- 20 noted an increase (or only noted incidents during the trial) – 47% (marked red),
- 21 noted no increase (or no motorbikes) – 49% (marked green),
- and the balance were unclassifiable (marked yellow).

This clearly shows that the pattern is mixed – some respondents clearly indicate increased use by motorbikes, while others have noticed a decrease or no change. It may be the case that motorbike use has increased only on certain stretches of the Loop, or at certain times, and this should be kept under review. However, it is clear that motorbikes have been accessing the Loop with the barriers in place, so they have not been effective in keeping motorbikes off the Loop.

# Recommendations

The recommendations have been collated and proposed by the Friends of the Fallowfield Loop on completion of the evaluation of the trial. They have been passed on to Sustrans and discussed together with Karen Branchley (Network Development Manager Sustrans NW) at the FotFL meeting on 19 September 2016.

1. In the light of the findings we are unanimous in our view that the open barrier policy should be continued indefinitely. The overwhelming response of cyclists is that the experiment has proved positive and has in many cases increased their use of the Loop. This includes not only those who use a variety of wide or long bikes, but also many using ordinary cycles who have found negotiating the internal barriers extremely difficult.
2. However, the concerns of the much smaller number of walkers who have expressed disapproval of the experiment need urgent attention. One concern is that it encourages cyclists to speed up and become a greater hazard to walkers. We would recommend that Sustrans allocate funds to install notices at the main entrances with a 'Share with Care' message. We are keen to know how Sustrans has addressed this problem at their other routes. Possibilities include a message printed onto the tarmac and/or attached to a post. The 'Share with Care' message could be accompanied by pictures of the different users – cyclists, walkers with dogs on a lead, joggers, wheelchairs. Would an experiment with modest speed bumps – or other landscaping – constitute too much of a hazard?
3. The other main concern of walkers (and some local residents) is the presence of motorbikes, though there is some disagreement whether the problem has increased since the barriers were open. Are the prohibition signs on the bridges sufficiently clear? Might they be included in the 'Share with Care' messages? Are the police adequate in their response to complaints? We need to show the very few concerned but vocal respondents that we can address their concerns.
4. We would recommend that Sustrans consider an audit of all the entrances to the Loop to identify the few which are impossible for wide bikes to negotiate, so that they all conform to a common pattern.
5. In the event of a continuation of the open barrier policy, we would recommend that the existing structure of the internal barriers be retained, but that the moveable lateral bars be removed as they constitute a possible future hazard.

6. We would welcome an early meeting with the relevant Sustrans personnel to discuss the points raised in this memo. At an appropriate time we think an item on the surveys and our agreed response to them should be sent to local media outlets.



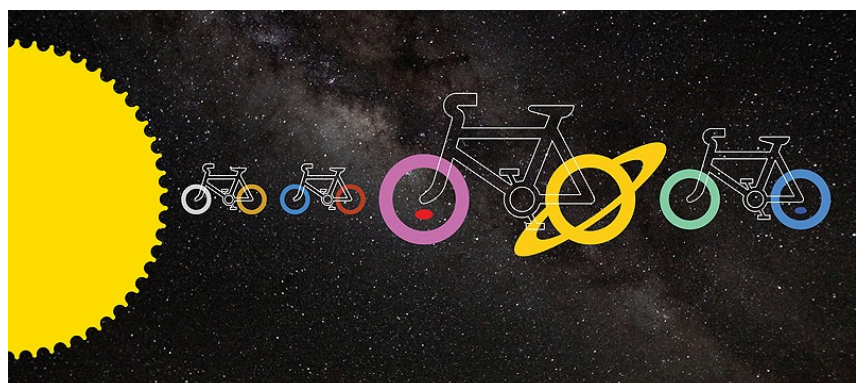
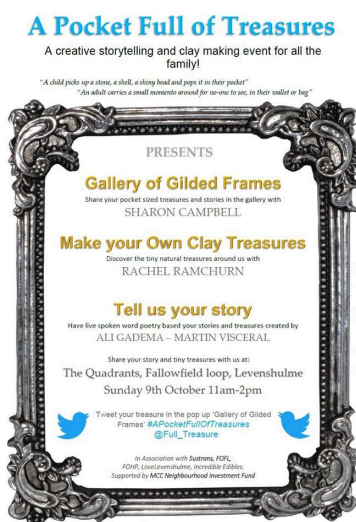
# Next steps

Throughout the trial volunteers from Sustrans and the FotFL, who have been championing and coordinating the trial, have been providing further commitment of time, energy and enthusiasm in organising events that would and will follow the formal end to the trial.

The following are a list (with selected images below) of some the events that have taken places since then:

- An art and craft event “A pocket full of treasure” at The Quadrants (Crayfield Entrance) on Sunday 9 October 2016
- A ride in conjunction with Manchester Science Festival “Cycling the Solar System” along the Fallowfield Loop on Sunday 23 October 2016
- And a family-friendly Halloween Kidical Mass bike ride where over 50 people (adults and children) participated, joined in the fun and celebrated cycling for all ages.

More events celebrating the Loop as an asset for all and varied legitimate users will continue to be organised by volunteers of both Sustrans and the Friends of the Fallowfield Loop.



*"I'm just writing to give you some feedback on the open barriers trial. Two words sum it up really: absolutely wonderful.*

*It's one of those things where you don't realise the effect of a thing until you are released from it. I never found the barriers that difficult to negotiate on a bike. They were more an irritation than anything else. But since they've been removed I have, for the first time, simply enjoyed the Loop and enjoyed the feeling of riding a bike on it."*

*(feedback received by email as part of the trial evaluation)*