

A Statement by MAG's Campaigns & Policy Adviser

I write this as an active campaigner for riders rights since the 1990s, a former BMF Chairman, a professional Adviser for MAG since 2010 – and a deeply concerned member of both organisations. In the light of recent claims by the BMF's new GRE, Graeme Hay, that he has 'solved' problems in Bedford I feel duty bound to reveal more of the truth about this situation than in recent BMF statements as they are misleading to say the least – and disturbingly wrong to be frank.

The truth is that Graeme's eleventh hour involvement with this issue has not solved any problems at all – apart from those that his new 'friends' in Bedford and Sustrans had failed to solve. Those problems came in the form of MAG's successful action, up to ministerial level, to thwart their relentless attempts over the last two years to ignore riders' rights and interests – in order to build an 'innovative' cycling scheme that would set a precedent for spreading a new generation of potentially fatal hazards for motorcyclists across the UK.

-In the light of which I make this extensive response in the hope that BMF members and its management will recognise this move as a mistake, and get the organisation and its representatives back on track to fight such threats rather than encourage more of them.

In fact, far from solving problems for PTW riders, Graeme's eleventh hour site visit and meeting with Bedford's officers and consequent recommendation that the BMF supports this scheme has created a whole range of new problems, as it is bad for UK biking on many levels. Equally critically, and apparently beyond the scope of consideration by Graeme, this junction is in no way a hot spot for cycling or PTW casualties. This is proved by Bedford's own figures. The application for DfT funding for this scheme states that there have only been two serious cycling casualties in the last ten years and one PTW rider. And, no substantive evidence was provided to show that their scheme would have definitely prevented any of those incidents happening.

To summarise the last year and a half, MAG blocked the introduction of two 'killer kerb' schemes. And, MAG was on the brink of stopping the latest Plan 2B scheme going ahead as it includes two stretches of 'killer spurs', i.e. 70mm high concrete ridges that cross the exit paths – and a pair of pinch-points that cut the lane width from 12m to 4m at critical points on the roundabout. However, the BMF did nothing regarding these proposals apart from supporting the latest scheme at the eleventh hour – and for reasons that may well merit further questioning and investigation.

Meanwhile, for those who are interested in the real truth about what has happened so far – and who has done what – here is a chronology of key events.

Crucial Background.

This proposal is the latest in series that were first submitted for funding in 2012, and it has far more significance for the future of riders' rights in the UK than it may seem at surface level. In essence, the primary aim for all of these proposals is to drastically cut road space at a junction that accommodates 25,000 vehicles per 12 hour day. The aim is to cut vehicle flow speed from around 25-30 mph to 15 mph in the hope that it will

make cyclists 'feel safer'. Critically though, Bedford's survey of the existing roundabout revealed that there are only 300 cyclists who ride on the roads at this junction which amounts to just 1.2% of the vehicles using it per day.

This latest proposal, currently made more likely to happen by BMF support for now, is to introduce two new pinch points and hazardous spurs of kerbing to drastically cut road space for PTW riders to manoeuvre in while negotiating a busy roundabout.

And, as such, it represents a new level of ignoring the interests and safety of bikers.

Equally critically, support from the BMF for this scheme will, if it continues without urgent revision, add to the problems faced by those of us who truly understand the full scale of threats to bikers from such groups as Sustrans.

Far from 'solving a problem' in Bedford, the BMF's new GRE, Graeme Hay has actually created a new pile of problems for all who truly care about progress for motorcyclists and motorcycling in the UK. This statement from Graeme should be treated with grave concern for reasons I set out below. And to be as fair to him as I can be, his highly questionable decision to support a scheme that is bad for motorcyclists *and* cyclists had the full support of the BMF's Chair of Political and Technical Services, Anna Zee.

Problem 1.

Bedford Borough council announced in April 2013, that it had DfT approval to build a Dutch style "Turbo-Roundabout" at Union Street – and that it would be built that summer. However, and critically for bikers, the scheme would include a series of four raised kerb lane dividers between the lanes on the roundabout.



Problem 1a.

The BMF did NOTHING at all about this dreadful proposal in 2013.

Meanwhile I as MAG's Policy adviser spotted the announcement and got Bedford's Cycling officer to informally admit that he had no idea about such things as 'high side' or 'low side' types of PTW crashes – and that he had not really considered that raised kerb dividers might increase the risk of them happening.

MAG Solution 1.

MAG raised sufficiently effective formal objections to the proposal with Bedford and the DfT to ensure that the scheme was not implemented during 2013.

Problem 2.

In Feb 2014, Bedford made their second attempt to ignore bikers' rights, safety and interest by announcing that they would implement another version of what became known as a 'killer kerb' roundabout scheme during the next month of March.



BMF non-solution 2.

The BMF did NOTHING at all about this second attempt to introduce a range of brand new hazards for riders of bikes powered by motors or pedals.

MAG Solution 2.

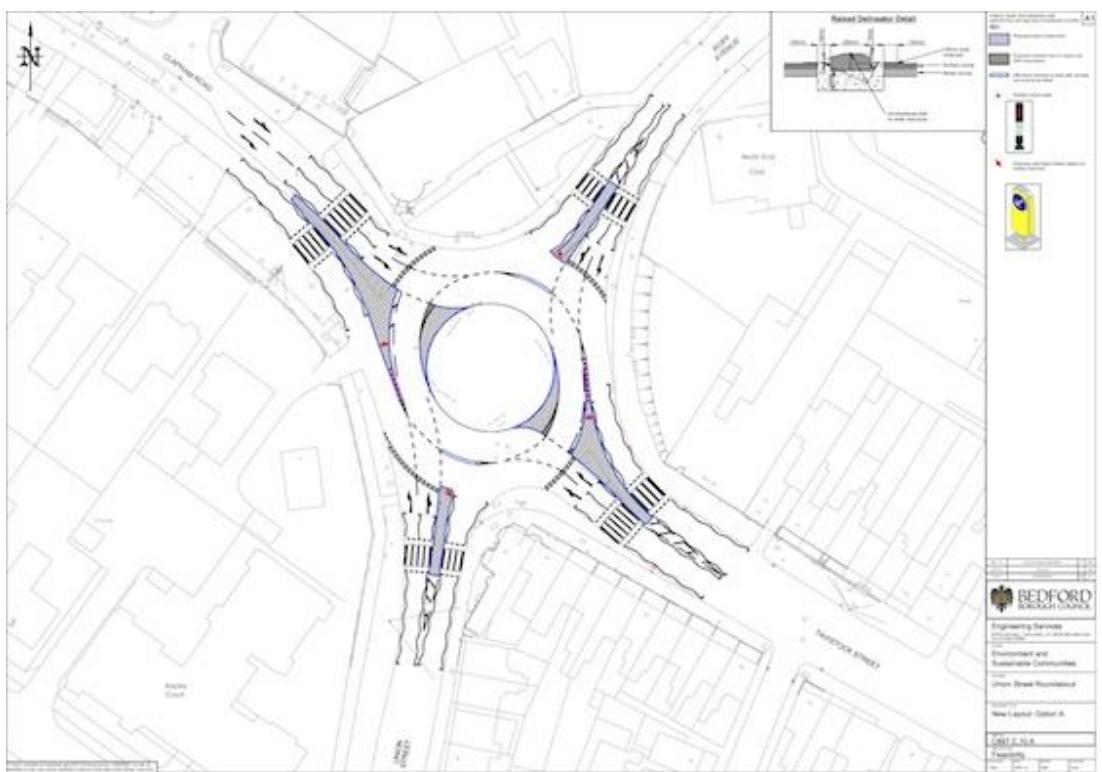
Meanwhile, the power of MAG's professional campaigns and lobbying team had been boosted by the appointment of former MP, Lembit Öpik as Director of Public Affairs and Communications. MAG's lobbying duo then raised even more damning objections to Bedford's new proposal, initially at a meeting in Bedford and at a

subsequent meeting at the DfT – and at Ministerial level. This intervention was by MAG alone and led to that proposal being dropped too.

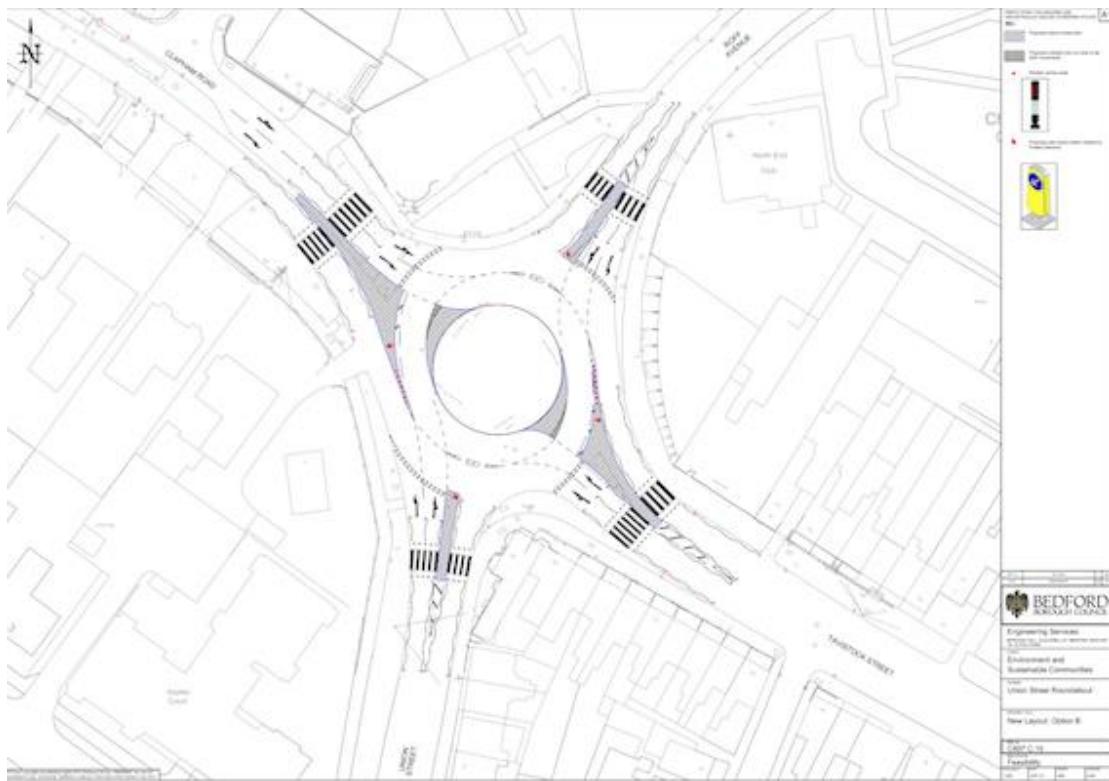
Problem 3.

Pro-cycling group Sustrans had been subcontracted by the DfT to approve funding for such schemes and were keen to get such an 'innovative' scheme implemented in Bedford as they would get 10% of the £420k cost. So, Sustrans drew up a third set of plans and told Bedford and the Dft that they would approve them.

These were sent to me on 30th May 2014, and called Plan 2A, which included two killer kerbs instead of four, and plan 2B, which included killer spurs and two new pinch points that cut the width of road space at those points from 12 to 4 metres.



Plan 2A



Plan 2B

Potential Solution 3.

During the BMF's May Show I met Graeme for the first time and had what seemed like a mutually respectful and cooperative conversation in which I brought him up to speed on the problems and MAG's solutions so far in Bedford. He expressed what I took to be a genuine enthusiasm for MAG and the BMF to work together in order to oppose any policy moves that would be bad for bikers. He was scheduled to be on holiday during the end of May and not be taking office until the start of June so it seemed unlikely that he would be involved with Bedford until mid June.

Following my conversation with Graeme I asked Anna Zee to invite him to contact me in the light of new developments regarding Bedford, as he had not been issued with a BMF phone or email address when we met, but nothing came of that request.

MAG Solution 3.

On Wednesday 4th June, Lembit and I had a very intense meeting with the senior DfT officer in charge of assessing the merits of the Bedford/Sustrans proposal and we served notice that neither plan was acceptable to MAG. This was followed up with details of MAG's objections that would have made it extremely risky for approval to be granted at Ministerial level – which Lembit rightly deduced was a decision to be made by the beginning of the following week.

At that point, MAG was on the brink of successfully thwarting Sustrans at a precedent-setting moment in their relentless mission to cut road space for motorcyclists in order to make cyclists 'feel safer' – and despite the fact that the latest

generation of such schemes would have a range of serious and potentially fatal adverse impacts on bikers.

Problem or Solution?

On 11th of June, I met Graeme by chance as he was also attending a TfL meeting in London. He then revealed that without making any contact with us in MAG he had made direct contact with officers in Bedford. And, as Graeme had been an officer in Wiltshire County Council for 28 years, he presumably found it easy arrange an informal visit and chat to discuss the roundabout in Bedford – and any other factors that might incline him to get the BMF to support their radical scheme

Strangely enough, and without discussing it at all with MAG, Graeme decided that the BMF should support Bedford's double pinch point roundabout scheme and he got authorisation to send a report declaring the BMF's support for Plan 2B to the DfT.

What's Next?

MAG has lodged formal objections to Bedford's current plan to implement Plan 2B without a fresh round of public consultation about a scheme that is radically different to the first proposal they made back in 2012.

Hopefully, BMF members and its Management Team will feel better informed about the real situation in Bedford, and acknowledge that mistakes may have been made – and that it may be best for riders' rights in the UK if support for a scheme that is bad for PTW riders is withdrawn.

Meanwhile, I will continue doing all I can as a policy professional for MAG to help win the battles we have now and those that we will inevitably face in the future. And on a personal level, I hope that the BMF will stand shoulder to shoulder with MAG in such battles rather than take action that could undermine the effectiveness of the work that UK bikers need and deserve from its riders' rights organisations.

**Dr Leon Mannings,
MAG Campaigns & Policy Adviser
2nd July 2014**