



CYCLING PLANET

AFTER THE OLYMPICS

WHAT WILL THE LEGACY BE FOR ORDINARY CYCLISTS ONCE THE OLYMPICS HAS LEFT LONDON?
JOURNALIST DOMINIC BLISS FINDS OUT ABOUT POST-GAMES PLANS FOR THE VENUES

This summer, if Britain's Olympic cyclists get even close to the medal success they had in Beijing, the sport will again be basking in glory. But any victories in London won't be the only legacy. There's also bricks and mortar: the Olympic cycling venues.

There are five of them in all. Two – Hampton Court Palace and The Mall – are simply backdrops for the time trial and road race. And one, the mountain bike course at Hadleigh Farm, in south Sussex, will be dismantled after the games. (There are plans for a future off-road bike course there, but the local authority hasn't yet given the green light.)

The remaining two venues – the velodrome and the BMX track, both in the Olympic Park, in east London – will be the most significant Olympic legacies. They are set to merge into one vast cycling facility.

It will be known as Lee Valley VeloPark, and is due to open to the public at the end of 2013, after the Olympics organisers hand it over to Lee Valley Regional Park Authority. There will be facilities for track cyclists, road cyclists, mountain bikers and BMXers.

The jewel in its crown will be the velodrome, which will remain pretty much as it is for the Olympics, with a 250-metre

central track made of Siberian pine, all surrounded by 6,000 seats. Precautions have been taken to ensure the pine doesn't expand or contract in years to come. It was shipped over to London from Russia a year ahead of installation to give it time to acclimatise. And if you're wondering why the building has been nicknamed 'the pringle', just take a look at the roof.

Kevin Owens is the man in charge of overseeing the design of all the Olympic venues. He says the organisers could have built a velodrome with 20,000 seats in it, and sold out every seat, every day of the

“The velodrome and BMX track will merge into a ‘VeloPark’ after the Olympics”

games. The problem is, after the games, they never would have attracted enough spectators to fill the vast, empty space. It would have been one of those dreaded Olympic white elephants. ‘So we went for 6,000 seats instead,’ Owens says. ‘The roof is very low, the internal volume of the building is quite small, the acoustics are very clean and the spectators are all able to see clearly.’ Owens believes, of all the

Olympic venues, the velodrome is best suited to a role as a public sports facility.

So what about the other cycling disciplines? Snaking around the outside of the velodrome will be a one-kilometre road cycling circuit and six kilometres of mountain bike trails – just four miles from the City of London. (Older cyclists may remember the Eastway Cycle Circuit that once occupied this exact same site.) The BMX track will remain but will be reconfigured for mere mortals who struggle to negotiate the berms and whoops with the same finesse as Shanaze Reade and her peers. The original plans for a BMX freestyle park and a cycle speedway have been shelved.

All levels of cyclist will eventually be allowed to use the VeloPark facilities, from lowly amateurs right up to top pros. Major cycling championships will be certainly be staged there in the future. British Cycling say its riders will also train there, especially in the main velodrome, although its headquarters will remain in Manchester.

Shaun Dawson, boss of Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, is understandably upbeat about taking on the new centre. ‘This venue will inspire a new generation of cyclists of all ages and abilities and attract cyclists from all disciplines, making it a cycling hub for London and the region. It will be a place where schoolchildren, clubs, groups and elite riders can train, race or just simply cycle for fun.’ ☺