

## Cycle Friendly Employer

# TOM BOWTELL

Tom is the CEO of the British Coatings Federation. He spoke to **Tiia Jaakola** about what he learned from becoming a Cycle Friendly Employer



**B**ack in 2010, Tom Bowtell's knee surgeon had bad news: it was time to give up impact sports, including running. As someone who had completed marathons and loved the runner's high, Tom needed an alternative.

He discovered that cycling gave him the same buzz, and says he became "totally obsessed". He began to go on weekend club rides. He now always takes a bike when going on holiday. But he says it's also a great way to combine a commute with keeping fit, while catering for his love of the outdoors and navigating.

When the British Coatings Federation [BCF], the organisation he heads up, moved to a new location in Coventry, Tom took the opportunity to install high-spec cycling facilities. Yet the showers, lockers and covered, secure bike parking didn't seem to be enough to lure others. He realised he was the only person using any of it.

"It goes to show that just by putting in a shower and a bike rack, nothing happens," he says. "You need a bit more push."

Tom had heard of the Cycle Friendly Employer scheme through being a member of Cycling UK. He decided to see if a self-audit could solve the mystery. The hunch was correct: it helped Tom see just how much more could be done.

"One of the big benefits of going through the process of the accreditation is that it opens your eyes to all the extra things you could do to really encourage people to cycle," he says. The initial self-assessment revealed that BCF would have scored a Bronze level – the lowest rung for achieving the award. Tom had bigger ambitions and decided to go away and implement what was missing, eventually achieving Gold.

As well as the existing physical facilities and Cycle to Work scheme the

### Going for gold

The Cycle Friendly Employer award is the international benchmark for active travel culture and infrastructure in the workplace. Gaining accreditation shows that an organisation puts its staff and the environment first. You can find out if your business might already qualify through the online self-assessment. It's quick and free. Visit [cyclinguk.org/cycle-friendly-employer](https://cyclinguk.org/cycle-friendly-employer)

business offered, he planned various routes for his employees to cycle to the office, and acquired pool bikes, a company toolkit and a track pump to share. He organised sessions to teach staff skills such as how to deal with flat tyres.

Tom recognises that one of the biggest barriers to cycling among his employees is the perception that cycling isn't safe enough. He sees the lack of investment in dedicated cycle paths as one of the great challenges in the UK. Since the cost-of-living crisis, Tom has observed some staff members swapping cars for bikes. "The challenge is getting people to give it a try," he says, "and to help them find a safe route to work."

That's why he thinks one of the best things BCF has done has been to organise monthly staff rides – with a stop at the pub. It's helped people build up their confidence, especially those who have not been on a bike since they were kids.

Across a bigger organisation the effects would be multiplied, but Tom says you don't have to be a huge company to do this. "The things we've done are not particularly expensive, and I do really think it improves morale in the office. The fact we've done these rides after work have been great team-building activities."

Tom found the process of getting accredited straightforward, if rigorous, which he thinks it should be. His message to workplaces considering the accreditation is to go for it.

He says: "If you want to get more people cycling, going through the process is great to work out what you're not doing, and what you could do to make it more attractive." Not only does it help an employer understand what more they could do, it also shows the employer cares about its staff by helping remove some of the obstacles to cycling. ●

