

Cyclists: are they going in the right direction?



by **Nigel Friswell**
of the
Horsham Society

WEST Sussex County Council is about to embark on alterations to the pavement in Harwood Road, Horsham, to accommodate cyclists as well as pedestrians.

The Horsham Society receives many comments from its members about the difficulties for pedestrians when they have to share their footway with cyclists. I have pondered long and hard about this and I now wonder if it is really a good idea.

Perhaps we are in danger of bringing up a whole

generation of cyclists who do not know how to use the roads safely as well as a generation of motorists who do not know how to behave towards non-motorists.

The Horsham cycle 'network' consists of a few bits and pieces of cycle lane, shared footpath and street signs. Mostly it peters out where it would be most useful because there is only the will (and the money) to do the easy bits. Even the county recognises that the Harwood Road scheme is unlikely to benefit most cyclists as it will not get them over the railway and into the town centre.

The crux of the matter is that there is some 'section 106' money, contributed from recent new housing in the area which has to be spent on improvements to transport.

It cannot be used for maintenance, so the really useful work, such as making sure that the tarmacadam at the edge of the road used by cyclists or the dropped drain gratings, cannot be repaired.

Ostensibly the scheme is supposed to encourage pupils to cycle to school, but the nature of Harwood Road and its relationship to the location of the schools makes this rather far-fetched. The county council did conduct a survey of the occupiers of some houses parallel to the route but neglected to survey people just beyond the route who might actually use it! Nor did they ask the question 'Do you cycle?' of those who were surveyed.

Notwithstanding the restrictions on the section 106 money, I think that it would be better long-term to

concentrate on promoting cycle proficiency, not only for young people but also for those who might return to using a bicycle after some years.

There should also be a campaign to make motorists aware that cyclists use the roads and that their needs should be recognised. Coupled with this, roadworks are needed, not just to repair the road margins but also to put right the mistakes of the past.

Chicanes, such as those in Harwood Road by the school crossing and in Queen Street by the New Street junction, are dangerous for cyclists. So are the jutting-out kerblines now installed at pedestrian crossings which force cyclists into the path of passing cars. Junctions need to be redesigned so that

cyclists already on the main road have right of way over cars joining from side roads.

Perhaps highways engineers need retraining in the real needs of cyclists and reminded that the county council has said that it prioritises pedestrians and cyclists before motorists.

Ideas such as these are not Horsham Society policy but need to be discussed so that members can make their views known.

The Horsham Society is concerned about the town's past, present and future and seeks to promote good planning and design for the built environment and open spaces.

For more information and details on how to join visit our website www.horshamsociety.org or telephone 01403 261905.