

Comments and suggestions on cycling on Penny Pot Lane, Harrogate

I have a number of comments and suggestions to make about cycling on Penny Pot Lane.

Penny Pot Lane is a legitimate cycle route

1. Penny Pot Lane is a route I often ride, and many other cyclists use it. For anyone who wants to cycle into the countryside to the west of Harrogate, or beyond into the Dales, it is an obvious route to take. (It is preferable to the A59 Skipton Rd, which is very busy, and hostile to cyclists).

2. Penny Pot Lane is recognised by the council as a cycle route: Harrogate BC's Cycling Implementation Plan of May 2013 shows Penny Pot Lane shaded yellow on the map of Local Development Framework cycle routes.

Problems with speed of vehicles and passing distances

3. Although it is better than the A59, Penny Pot Lane is not a perfect cycle route. It can be unpleasant and feel dangerous. This is because, too often, vehicles pass cyclists too fast and too close.

4. The general problem is that Penny Pot Lane is a narrow, country road, which is uphill as you leave Harrogate – steeply uphill from Oak Beck, then slightly uphill from the roundabout junction with Oaker Bank. Although it is quieter than the A59, there is considerable traffic (with some vehicles probably using it as an alternative to the A59).

Speed differential

5. Cyclists go fairly slowly up Penny Pot Lane – I do about 15-16mph on the slightly uphill section after the junction with Oaker Bank.

6. Beyond the barracks, the national speed limit of 60mph applies. In my opinion, that is too fast. A lot of drivers treat the speed limit as a target (contrary to rule 146 of the Highway Code), and do not adapt their speed to the road, and to the presence of cyclists (as required by rules 125 and 146 of the Highway Code). I have also seen vehicles which were going (in my estimation) significantly faster than 60mph.

Space given when passing

7. A large majority of vehicles do allow plenty of space when overtaking, when it is easy to do so. (Rules 163 and 212 of the Highway Code state how much space should be given, and there's a photo with rule 163 showing a car on the other side of the road, to give a cyclist plenty of room).

8. However, when it is inconvenient to leave plenty of room, because vehicles would have to slow down and wait before overtaking – for example, because of oncoming traffic, or a pinch point – then far fewer do so. A large minority of vehicles squeeze past in a dangerous way.

(The behaviour/patience of drivers also differs, depending on the day of the week and the time of day).

9. There is guidance on overtaking cyclists in the government's Cycle Infrastructure Design document (Local Transport Note 2/08). It states that, 'Cyclists often feel uncomfortable when cars overtake, particularly if they do so at high speed' (para 2.5.1). It says cars travelling at 30mph should give cyclists a minimum 1m50 clear passing distance from the cyclists' 'dynamic envelope' (the width of a cyclist, including any wobbles or deviation from their line, estimated at about 1m). It also notes, 'As speed differential between cyclists and motor traffic increases, greater separation is required' (para 2.1.1).

10. It follows that vehicles travelling at speeds higher than 30mph should leave more than 1m50 when passing cyclists.

Specific issues on Penny Pot Lane

Narrow road and oncoming traffic

11. Penny Pot Lane is relatively narrow, and gets narrower as you go further up it, away from Harrogate. In many places, it is impossible for vehicles travelling at 60mph to give appropriate space when passing cyclist.

12. When there is oncoming traffic, vehicles ought to slow down, and wait until the oncoming traffic passes. Most vehicles do, but a significant minority do not. Too often, they squeeze past at high speed, leaving minimal space as they pass. I have experienced this on many occasions, and it is horrible.

Uneven road surface

13. The road surface on the left hand side where cyclists ride is rough, with potholes in places. Theoretically, vehicles should give cyclists space to avoid uneven road surfaces (rule 213 of the Highway Code), but too often they don't.

Blind bend and pinch points

14. Very shortly after the little bridge over Oak Beck, there is a sharp bend to the left, and you can't see around it. Most vehicles wait until after the bend to pass, but some squeeze past in a dangerous way.

(Incidentally, at the traffic lights immediately before the bridge, I wave vehicles past me before setting off, so that there is less chance of someone being stuck behind me at that bend).

15. There are five pedestrian refuges which create pinch points (two at the entrances to the Oakdale housing estate, two by the Uniacke Barracks, and one at the entrance to the Household Waste & Recycling Centre). Also, the road narrows immediately after the roundabout junction with Oaker Bank, creating another pinch point. Vehicles should wait until after these pinch points to pass, but a significant minority try to squeeze past at them.

16. Cycle Infrastructure Design identifies pedestrian refuges as dangerous pinch points for cyclists (para 5.7.1).

Suggested solutions

17. I have some suggestions as to how cyclist safety and comfort could be improved on Penny Pot Lane.

Create a cycle path alongside Penny Pot Lane

18. In my opinion, there is space to build a cycle path alongside Penny Pot Lane, at least from the junction with Oaker Bank. There is a grass verge all the way up the left hand side of the road, as you go away from Harrogate. No trees would have to be cut down.

a. This should be a true, Dutch-style cycle path. It would make it significantly less desirable as a cycle route if it were constantly blocked by pedestrians, and careful thought would have to be given to this. If the local army barracks think it would be useful as a marching route, that should be encouraged, as they would use it in an organised, limited and specific way, which would not present a problem to cyclists.

b. Cyclists should not be required to give way at farm gates. The same rules should apply as to the road.

c. It should be slightly raised, or have a kerb, to make it genuinely safe, and stop vehicles 'borrowing' it.

d. If practical, it could allow cycling in both directions. If not, the uphill route, away from Harrogate, should be prioritised.

19. It could be made into a circuit by continuing a cycle lane along the B6451 to Watson's Lane; along Watson's Lane (probably only signposting would be needed here, as it is a very quiet road); then along Broad Dubb Road and Norwood Lane to Beckwithshaw. This could be a cycle path similar to the one I've suggested for Penny Pot Lane.

(Broad Dubb Road and Norwood Lane suffer similar problems to Penny Pot Lane, but not so acute).

Tour de France legacy

20. A cycling legacy is fundamental to the hosting of the Tour de France, according to the report prepared by Harrogate BC in August 2013, as a basis for approving the contracts and financing for the race. This could be a Tour de France legacy cycle way. It is a good area for cycling, because it is in lovely countryside, towards the Dales (but in general not too hilly). It works well from Harrogate, as you go out against the prevailing wind, and come home with it.

21. I believe it would be highly popular, if cyclists were genuinely safe from being 'buzzed' by speeding vehicles. This would encourage families with children, and less confident cyclists to use it, as well as experienced road cyclists. It would be top-class cycle infrastructure, which would attract visitors to the town and the area.

22. I am very much in favour of the cycleways such as the Nidderdale Greenway. I understand there is a plan to join Harrogate to Spofforth via a cycleway, as a TDF legacy route. I think that would be brilliant, and I support it. However, these cycleways favour leisurely cycling (as there are regular barriers, and many walkers and dog walkers on them - and indeed the Nidderdale Greenway is limited to 10mph). It would be a shame to leave road cyclists out of the Tour de France legacy – and the Tour de France is, after all, a road cycling event. Penny Pot Lane also has the advantage of being very close to the route of the Tour de France 2014 (Stage 2)

Pinch points

23. Until a cycle path can be built, the pinch points at pedestrian refuges should be made safer, with cyclist by-passes.

Signs

24. Until a cycle path can be built, the councils might consider signs that would help cyclists. I have seen signs in France, which show a cyclist and a car, with <1m50> between them, encouraging drivers to allow that as minimum distance when overtaking. Such signs would be valuable here.

Speed limit

25. If I'm right that 60mph is too fast for this road, the speed limit could be reduced to 50 or 40mph.

Access from Harrogate

26. There would have to be safe, comfortable access to this route from Harrogate. I have a few comments.

B6162 Otley Rd from Prince of Wales roundabout towards Beckwithshaw.

27. This is a very busy road, which is quite narrow – and for some reason, the left hand carriageway as you leave the Prince of Wales roundabout and head towards Beckwithshaw is narrower than the right hand carriageway. From a cyclist's point of view, this is the opposite of what is required, because you can keep up with the traffic whilst going downhill to the roundabout, but not when going uphill away from it.

28. The main issue is vehicles squeezing past without giving enough space, especially at peak times, including the school run.

29. It would be great if a cycle lane could be provided, but I acknowledge it isn't easy to see how/where without a great deal of re-organisation of road space. However, if it could be achieved, it would be a benefit not only for access to Penny Pot Lane, but also for utility cyclists, going to work, town, or school.

30. The pavements either side of the road are quite wide. (Some cyclists already use them. Although this is illegal, I understand why). A cycle lane might make use of some of the pavement space on one side of the road. However, just painting a white bicycle on half of one of the pavements, and calling it a cycle lane, is not a solution. If you make cyclists stop and give way at every side road, it will be a very poor facility, and it will not be used, except by cyclists who already choose to use the pavement.

31. The advanced stop boxes for cyclists on this road are useful, but they are regularly disregarded by a proportion of drivers.

Harlow Moor Rd and Cornwall Rd

32. These roads have extremely poor surfaces, having been dug up very often, and because there are potholes.

David Mitchell
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