

**Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

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To: FRANCIS\_VERNON@hotmail.com

Dear Mr Vernon,

**Open Letter to West Sussex and Horsham Councils**

Thank you for your letter outlining the health and other benefits of cycling. Over the last few years West Sussex County Council has carried out significant work to improve cycling and walking. Horsham and Chichester have in particular benefited from investment via the Governments Local Sustainable Transport Fund. This has included new and improved routes as well as programmes of work such as Living Streets 'Walk to' programme and Sustrans 'Bike It'. The South Downs National Park Authority has also benefited from running programmes encouraging walking and cycling in the Park. In addition there is significant investment in creating new cycle routes elsewhere in the county in conjunction with the Local Economic Partnership.

That is not to say that there is not much more that can be done. The most recent information I have shows around 3% of residents cycling 5 days a week. Very recently West Sussex County Council adopted a new Walking and Cycling Strategy covering the period 2016-2026. The strategy was written specifically to recognise the benefits of cycling and walking, to lead to infrastructure improvements and was created in conjunction with various cycling and walking groups. The County Council's Strategy, which is also intended to support the Government's new Cycling and Walking Strategy, can be found [here](#):

A key part of this work was to allow the community to input schemes that would allow the creation of an appropriate network of suitable routes. This has resulted in a prioritised list of around 300 different schemes. The cycle fora are now engaged with the Council to help to identify which of these schemes should be considered for whatever funding is available. Once that work is finished our intention is to set up a delivery board that will include Public Health to monitor progress.

A key part of developing the network is ensuring that the most is made of the opportunities offered by local development. The strategy sets out high level standards that new facility is expected to follow. In the coming months officers will be meeting with planning colleagues and all District and Borough Councils to determine how the aspirations of the new strategy can best be met. In addition the Council will make the most of any other funding opportunities that are available. We will therefore continue to work with the Local Economic Partnership to improve key parts of the National Cycle Network over the coming years. The council has also recently bid for nearly £1m to the Governments Access Fund with the theme of 'Cycling and Walking: From Leisure to Everyday

Trips'. This bid is supported by Public Health and the outcome will be known in December.

In respect of safety, it is true that the number of cycling casualties has increased in recent years albeit a trend that appears to be reducing now. This in fact is similar to many areas and seems to be linked with an increase in the numbers of people cycling, particularly following 2012, rather than necessarily being demonstrative of an increase in the risk of injury. That said it is clear that the appropriate response in this respect is a balance of infrastructure and education / training. Despite the recent efforts described above, building a cycling network will cost many tens of millions of pounds and take many years to complete. It is therefore vital that we focus efforts on key routes and continue to provide training. Currently the Council carries out Bikeability training, available for all year 6 pupils (with over 8,000 receiving training annually) and also offers adult and balance bike training. Finally West Sussex County Council assisted the West Sussex Cycle Forum by hosting the Forum's Cycle Summit' on 30<sup>th</sup> September at County Hall.

I hope you can see that there is already much being done to help to improve cycling and walking across West Sussex with more to come. As Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, I take cycling and walking seriously and support the work mentioned above to make the most of this vital mode of transport.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John O'Brien". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

John O'Brien  
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport