



Does halfway make sense?

I had a good meeting this afternoon with a considerate man from the Go Cycle project today: it was about the planned cycle lane up St Mark's Hill and trying to mitigate the effects of the cycle lane raised barriers on mobility-impaired members of the community who need a car parked directly outside of church in order to have access to the church or hall. He heard what the churchwardens and I had to say, and I think the plans can be creatively adjusted to help.

Now my next point depends on you knowing Surbiton but I said that I was surprised the cycle lane was going ahead, because it didn't seem that there was much point in the cycle lane up St Mark's Hill when the only hairy bit for cyclists is actually negotiating the roundabout outside Surbiton station and nothing was going to change there. (That is what will stop me letting my children cycle to St Andrew's church, for example.)

His reply was along these lines: "That's fair comment. When it was a £40 million project, we were going to do something at that roundabout, but then it got cut to a £30 million project, & the roundabout reconfiguration had to drop out of the plans."

"Did it have to be that expensive?" I asked.

"If we had done it, it wouldn't have just been for the cyclists: we would have had to move the taxi rank,

readjust the car spaces..."

So I recognise it was a major project. Yet without it, it seems to me that the remaining lane up St Mark's Hill is slightly pointless. If you're confident enough to cycle round the roundabout outside the station (and it's not exactly Hyde Park corner, I admit), then you're confident enough cycling up St Mark's Hill, without a separate cycle lane. From a personal perspective, it will be mildly more pleasant, but it still feels like an awful lot of money just to ease the vicar's cycling back up the hill after church on a Sunday.

I think the hope is that they'll do this bit first and then find the money for the station roundabout area in due course but you don't know if that's going to happen, and if it doesn't, then it's going to have minimal impact on cycling up this road, in which case, what's the point?

It made me think about how many other projects may be like this: compromises which make sense in terms of cutting one's cloth and making do, but which make no sense in terms of actual impact.

And in some cases, there's a psychological truth here too: as Alcoholics Anonymous have it, you can't go half way on giving up alcohol. You either go the whole hog or you remain an alcoholic.

The compromise is often what happens, but then quite often what happens is nothing changes.

October 2016. Thought for the Train is a short column written by the Reverend Robert Stanier, the vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train, or elsewhere. You can also read "Thought for the Train" at www.surbitonchurch.org.uk.