Hedgecutting - Forum asks landowners to help cyclists

A statutory body responsible for advising on rights of way and access matters is calling on landowners to make sure cyclists are protected during this year’s hedge cutting season.

With the hedge cutting season starting in September and only lasting for six months – due to the protected bird nesting season – the County Durham Local Access Forum (LAF) are aware of the time pressures on landowners. But with cycling in the county continuing to grow, they’re asking landowners to take extra care to avoid causing potentially fatal injuries.

Changes to alternate-year hedge cutting practices for stewardship farmers means that hedges are now often more overgrown with stronger thorns which are more likely to cause punctures.

As a result, the County Durham LAF is asking landowners to ensure that they – or their contractors – deploy warning signs and clear roads and paths as they go along.

David Maughan of the County Durham Local Access Forum, said: “We need to encourage the use of warning boards by landowners when hedge cutting is being done or has recently been completed, and the cuttings may be on road surfaces. While this is a further expense, it would prove an invaluable aid to cyclists in trying to avoid puncture risks, and would also provide evidence that farmers were taking their obligations to road and path users seriously.”

Geoff Rigden of the County Durham Local Access Forum, adds: “Overgrown hedges from gardens can also prevent enjoyment of the great outdoors and make every day journeys difficult. We are urging everyone with a hedge which can grow over a highway or path to think about users and make sure it’s kept tidy and sweep up any cuttings immediately.”

As well as cyclists, the dangers of unobstructed paths and thorns can also be hazardous to pedestrians, equestrians, those with visual impairments, elderly people and pushchair users.