

Cycling & Social Distancing Measures in Town and Village Centres in Mole Valley (June 2020)

Brief

Mole Valley District Council are in talks with Surrey County Council about the Social Distancing Measures they can introduce in Town and Village Centres in the area. Currently this raises more questions than answers and the funding is likely to be relatively modest. However, the Cycling Forum has been asked for feedback on what is needed when they come to introduce measures that will work in commercial centres. The larger and busier the centres, the greater the challenge, but it is likely that centres such as Bookham and Ashted will also need to be considered. Emphasis is likely to be all about making the commercial centres work under the social distancing rules, having regard for deliveries, disabled drivers etc. with the likely focus on getting the town centres up and running again.

So, what do you think would work for cycling? Is it a matter, for example, of providing good peripheral cycle parking and keeping the centres free for pedestrians? Is it important to provide through routes? It is important consider other users too and how the additional measures to promote cycling will work with the other activities that take place and with the social distancing rules.

Given the disparate nature of our main towns there is unlikely to be a "one size fits all" solution. However, one thought might be to introduce a 20mph limit in all these centres to make it easier and safer for pedestrians and cyclists to make greater use of the road space when social distancing.

Let us have any ideas that will be quick, easy and inexpensive to implement, and the responses will be gathered together and forwarded to the Officers at MVDC. If they can be prioritised, so much the better.

Amalgamated Responses (as received by 1/6/2020)

We are sure that MVDC & SCC will be familiar with what they are able to do quickly and easily based on the government guidance <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reallocating-road-space-in-response-to-covid-19-statutory-guidance-for-local-authorities>

A couple of respondees were interested in how much funding was likely to be available as this might give them a better feel for what was feasible to suggest.

According to the DfT, Surrey has been allocated £8,482,000. It would be useful to understand the criteria for allocating this across the districts and boroughs.

Most common across the responses is agreement with the introduction of 20mph speed limits in town and village centres (and where possible on feeder routes most used by cyclists and pedestrians) to make it easier and safer for pedestrians and cyclists to make greater use of the road space when social distancing. Comments include:

- These would be an effective tool in persuading some of those currently to worried about safety to risk either themselves or their children on two wheels.
- The idea of a 20mph limit in the centres is a good one, and could well be considered for a permanent measure rather than a temporary one. For example, Dorking has a 'bypass' available - Station Road and Ashcombe Road, for those who don't want to be subjected to a 20mph limit.
- A 20 mph limit in all town and village centres would bring a range of benefits - improved road safety, air quality and potentially lower congestion through discouraging motorised through traffic - as well as improving the conditions for social distancing. See the link below for more (including an example letter from an Ashted resident and campaigner). This would be a very cost effective measure with short and long term benefits.
Air Quality, Covid-19 and How 20mph Limits Help Us To Breathe Easily:
http://www.20splenty.org/air_quality_covid_19_and_20mph_limits
- 20mph would be a useful measure, but unlikely to cost £8,482,000.
- The main aim should be to restrict motorised through traffic eg. that passing through Dorking Town centre has the option of using the Ashcombe Road route. A 20 mph limit would help with this but other traffic management measures could be taken to divert motorised traffic wherever possible by means of "except for access" arrangements/signage. Free car parking at the edge of towns and villages could also dissuade drivers coming into the centres. The quieter the roads, the easier it is for people walking and cycling to keep their social distance. This has been very noticeable during the lockdown period. People are generally very sensible and responsible but do need the space to be able to distance appropriately.

Cycle parking has not been commented, although increased use of cycles could result in this becoming an issue. One comment I would make is that if increased use of social distance markings outside shops becomes more prevalent, they need to be placed to avoid or "skip" cycle parking, eg. outside Dorking Waitrose the queue can double-back past the cycle racks and then down Junction Road. Maybe number the positions to avoid misunderstandings? Other related comments:

- I don't think it is concerns about where to lock your bike that put people off riding but road safety. Cycle parking facilities may encourage commuters to train stations but that is not what we are talking about here.

I would say that this is not a priority for expenditure but something that should follow improvements in routes and increasing bike usage.

Through routes for cycling are very important as connectivity as key to encouraging people to cycle more and to do so for A to B riding rather than just for leisure. There is a great risk that car use will increase due to the concerns and advice about public transport use. Ideally we should be looking to aim high locally in by providing separate cycle lanes in town and village centres wherever possible. This will again aid distancing and safety. Connectivity between towns and villages should also be a key aim. In the short term funding proper maintenance of existing footways and shared routes needs to be given a higher priority as in many cases social distancing is not possible (see the question raised at the March Local Committee meeting: <https://mycouncil.surreycc.gov.uk/documents/s66738/Item%204a%20-%20Written%20Public%20Questions.pdf>) Since then vegetation growth has continued to exacerbate the situation. Other related comments:

- Westcott into Dorking the cycle path from Milton Avenue is not used by faster cyclists who have travelled directly along the A25, for various reasons eg. it disappears at the bus stop etc. is used as a dog walking extension and is not socially distanced.
- I would not cycle on the A24 (south from Dorking) without a dedicated cycle path, or at the very least a section of the road dedicated to cycles.
- Getting to the village/town centres safely is more important- crucial- than circulating within them.

The following response is included verbatim, even though it doesn't provide any concrete suggestions, it makes a number of valid points worth thinking about:

- 1) The perception of safety is as important as physical safety.
- 2) The town needs to implement large changes over a wide area. Small changes will result in an 'uncanny valley' that leads to people acting in the same way they always have but with worse outcomes.
- 3) All the rat runs need to be filtered to motor traffic. This means that cars will have access to all parts of the town, but will not be able to short circuit the strategic roads.
- 4) There needs to be a circulation plan that reduces the available network to cars and manages their movements from one part of the town to another.
- 5) A strategic LOVM (low operating velocity and momentum) network needs to be put in place to create physical separation and allow vehicles with a low operating velocity and momentum to access the town conveniently, in safety & comfort.
- 6) A communications strategy that informs the public of the necessity and duration of the changes needs to be put in place so people are able to properly plan and adapt to the changes.