

Post Lockdown Reopening of the Town

The Government has announced emergency funding to support active travel initiatives to avoid a health and environmental crisis caused by increased use of private cars as people seek to get back to work and resume normal life. Millions of pounds are being “*released as soon as possible so that work can begin at pace on closing roads to through traffic, installing segregated cycle lanes and widening pavements,*” says a letter sent to all English local authorities on May 27. The letter tells local authorities that walking and cycling are now “*essential*” forms of transport that can “*help us avoid overcrowding on public transport systems as we begin to open up parts of our economy.*”

The restrictions on the use of public transport is predicted to increase traffic congestion causing greater levels of air pollution, impacting on our health and setting back the environmental gains made during the lockdown.

To enable shops and businesses to reopen and ensure that there is public confidence in using the High Streets again there is a need to review of how public space is utilised within the town centre to accommodate social distancing requirements. Many of the public car parks are currently little used. During the lockdown traffic speeds have increased with fewer vehicles on the road and a light touch by the Police to traffic speed violations. There has been a significant increase in cycling and walking during the lockdown and a strong

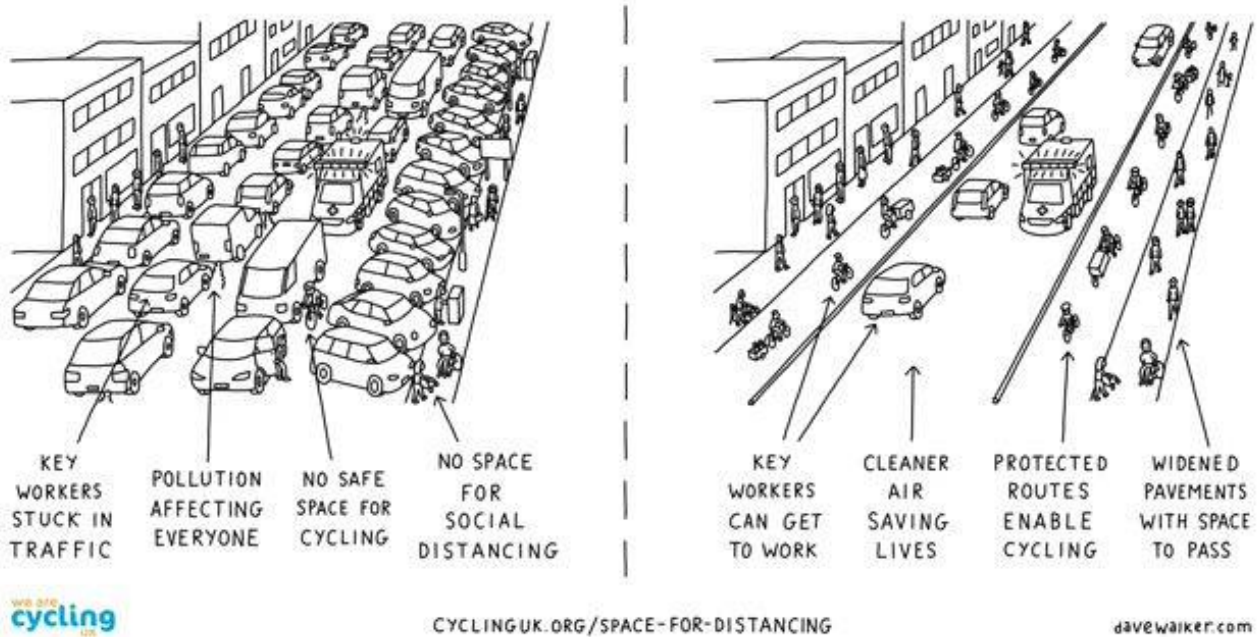
preference by many to continue this as the preferred means of movement for short and medium length journeys, including commutes. East Sussex County Council have made it clear that there are no funds to address the high traffic speeds in Malling Street and the police seemingly have no resources to monitor town centre traffic speeds. The solution must be with **all future road design** to include features which reduce the opportunity to exceed the permitted speed limits. the town of Lewes traffic system is still designed to accommodate pre by-pass through traffic.

Public safety is key

The government have announced that shops can reopen on Monday 15th June. It is important that as many shops as possible reopen in Lewes, and particularly those within the historic core so that they remain viable and can help maintain the historic fabric of the town. To enable this to happen it will be vital for public safety that those wishing to visit shops can maintain social distancing. This has been difficult within the narrow street where most pavements are less than 2 metres wide and social distancing can only be maintained by people walking out into the road. This will be further exacerbated where it is necessary to queue on the pavement where the numbers allowed within shops will be restricted, increasing the necessary minimum width of pedestrian space to 5.5m. As there are few places in the town centre where this is available pedestrians will only be able to socially distance pass within the road. Passing cyclists and cabriolet type cars will also need to be 2 metres from pedestrians. In consequence there is inadequate space readily available for pedestrians and cyclists without compromising their safety unless a solution is found to utilise road space.

DECISION TIME

BACK TO NORMAL, OR FAST TRACK TO THE FUTURE?



Stark choice to keep shops accessible.

The key must be to reallocate space in the town centre to ensure that the safe movement of pedestrians can continue whilst observing the necessary social distancing. This can only safely take place if road space is reallocated for pedestrians. To facilitate this on street car parking from the town centre streets must be reduced and full use taken of the off street car parks. The vacated road space can then be reallocated for safe pedestrian use. At the same time to avoid large volumes of cars returning to town centre streets the enthusiasm and desire for safe cycling must be maintained with dedicated cycling facilities, making it safer and more pleasant. The creation of temporary cycle lanes along the main transport arteries of the town will provide safe and convenient access for cyclists to travel to and through the town helping to reduce traffic levels. This provision should ensure that it is safe for all members of the family and help divert school aged children away from car generated journeys which can no longer be accommodated.

Local Cycling and Walking = less pollution

Physical distancing means Lewes needs to urgently implement these new measures to enable people to travel and spend time safely in the town. The necessary emergency measures below reflect the changing demands caused by the Covid-19 crisis, and are consistent with the steps **Cycle Lewes** are recommending to improve cycling and walking routes in the town through the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan and the new County Council Local Transport Plan. The proposals are considered to have a multitude of benefits from improving the road space in the town centre creating sustainable transport links and opening up public spaces to support physical and mental wellbeing.

The Department for Transport (DfT), stresses: “We have a window of opportunity to act now to embed walking and cycling as part of new long-term commuting habits and reap the associated health, air quality and congestion benefits.”

Cycle Lewes and **Lewes Living Streets** propose that cars should be banned in the vicinity of schools to create a safer and better environment for children and their families. Any temporary arrangements proposed can be reviewed in the summer holiday period to maximise take-up in the next academic year.

Financial and local support

The Covid-19 crisis has shown the need to think boldly and creatively about how we can implement change while recognising the financial constraints that we will be under as the economic impact is felt. The central government grants will offset the cost of works, and materials to create the temporary spaces may be loaned from Lewes Bonfire Societies, who have stockpiles of barriers and other road calming materials. **Lewes Living Streets** are also very supportive of this work.

Local businesses may be resistant to even this temporary change at this point in time, but an urgent workable solution must be found to ensure Lewes is a safe place to shop and people are confident to return to their previous shopping habits as

quickly as possible. It is noteworthy that the town's best shopping experience is on Christmas shopping night when the High Street is free of traffic. Other towns in East Sussex, such as Uckfield and Eastbourne, have prioritised pedestrians, attracting more shoppers. The changes in Cliffe High Street were once resisted, but the success of a pedestrian-friendly environment is now recognised and cherished.

Emergency social distancing measures - 'do nothing' is not an option!

We are mindful that the government have stated that, *"To receive any money under this or future tranches, you will need to show us that you have a swift and meaningful plan to reallocate road space to cyclists and pedestrians, including strategic corridors,"* continues the letter, signed by Rupert Furness, a deputy director of the Department for Transport. Furness has made it clear that *'Anything that does not meaningfully alter the status quo on the road will not be funded,'*

Cycle Lewes and **Lewes Living Streets** have considered the constraints, options and opportunities and consider the reallocation of road space is the only viable option involving pop-up cycle lanes, widening footways and pedestrianising areas where more space is needed for queueing to support physical distancing and considering one-way walking routes in the town centre.

The proposals

1. The reduction of the amount of 'through traffic' coming in/out of Lewes (which should use the A27 by-pass) through signage, narrower carriageways, advance stop lines for cyclists and change of phasing of traffic lights (including priority for pedestrians).
2. To facilitate safe pedestrian passing in the road and segregated cycling remove on-street parking along the entire length of Lewes High Street through School Hill to Westgate so that this part of the High Street is limited to bus access, essential delivery and collections only, with any restricted to a single centre lane with passing spaces allocated at appropriate convenient locations.

3. Albion Street will need to be closed at its southern end except for cyclist and pedestrians.
4. Friars Walk and Lansdowne Place on street car parking to be similarly relocated to off-street car parks.
5. Eastgate Street to be narrowed to one lane to ensure wider pavements on both sides.
6. The restriction of loading and unloading to certain hours in the key town centre streets to avoid conflict with shoppers.
7. Reallocate vacated road space to pedestrians and contra-flow for cyclists, dependent on configurations.
8. Mountfield Road on-street parking to be removed to adjacent off-street car park and footway to be provided on the south side of the carriageway to ensure social distancing.
9. Offham Road from Junction of King Henry's Road to Commercial Square to have on road cycle lanes in each direction so that cyclist have priority use of this space.
10. Nevill Road from Prison crossroads to the Old Racecourse motor roads to have on road cycle lanes in each direction so that cyclists have priority use of this space.
11. Phoenix Causeway to have on road cycle lanes in each direction so that cyclists have priority use of this space.
12. Traffic using Station Street and Fisher Street shall have movement into the High Street prevented with road cycle lane in south north direction so that cyclists have priority use of this space.
13. Make available all public car parks in the town so that all displaced permit holders can readily transfer from on-street spaces.
14. Restrict loading and unloading within town centre to certain hours possibly focussed between 9.00 and 10.00am when pedestrian flows are lightest.
15. Ban all traffic from Cliffe High Street except during limited loading periods with rigorous enforcement.

16. Provide two-way access for cyclists on East Street (either along its full length or to Albion Street and then make School Hill from Albion Street down to Eastgate Street two-way).
17. Ban motor traffic around school pick up and drop off times during term time. This should include Potters Lane, the section of Southover High Street from Eastport Lane to Southover Road; and Gundreda Road from its junction with Fitzjohn Road to Wallands School. Mountfield Road should also have restricted access with no access to the household waste site during the start and finish of the school day.
18. Rigorously enforce the 20mph and other speed limits in town, including use of all CCTV.
19. Parking wardens to be reallocated roles to include enforcing traffic controls and social distancing.

References:

Shoppers and how they travel

Civitas/Sustrans, Liveable neighbourhoods Series 2006

<http://cidadanialxmob.tripod.com/shoppersandhowtheytravel.pdf>

Tackling traffic dominance in Lewes: a report

John Dales/Urban Movement June, 2019

<https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/media/4442/lewes-report-jdv1.pdf>

Deputy Director of the Department of Transport (DfT), Rupert Furness,.

Letter to all councils across England laying out funding streets during Covid 19 crisis and beyond

<https://lcc.org.uk/articles/dft-funding-for-london-make-it-fast-make-it-count>

Safer routes to schools and school streets

<https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-with-us/safer-routes-to-school>

<https://www.sustrans.org.uk/our-blog/projects/2019/uk-wide/sustrans-school-streets>

Contact details:

<https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/get-involved/local-groups/lewes>

E: lewesgroup@livingstreets.org.uk

<https://www.cyclelewes.org.uk/> E:info@cyclelewes.org.uk