

## Report on Public Realm (updated 15-May-23)

### Introduction and background

Making the Tunbridge Wells town centre a “Public Realm” where those on foot can walk in comfort was widely supported when conceived more than a decade ago. Stage 1 partly pedestrianised Fiveways and Stage 2 aimed for a “Public Square” in the area around the War Memorial and the (to be) Amelia Scott. Later potential stages include(d) reducing motor vehicle movements on Monson Road and on Mount Pleasant near the main station.

The Pantiles area is almost traffic-free and there are significantly fewer motor vehicles in the High Street. The overall concept thus imagined a pleasant walk with few motor vehicles from the bottom to the top of town. This long-held ambition of joining the two ends of town received added impetus from the early work on the Town Centre Area Plan.

The detailed design of Stage 2 lost certain key features and the Public Realm vision mutated into a scheme with minor road layout changes: some say to the detriment of pedestrians<sup>1</sup>: Links to the original<sup>2</sup> and final<sup>3</sup> drawings show the scheme compromises: the road was not narrowed as planned; tarmac (and a white centre line) replaced the granite setts; taxis allowed access and the pedestrian crossing point on Monson Road removed. Tree-planting is not as extensive as envisaged in the original sketch<sup>4</sup> and the existing bus-gate to Fiveways was not adapted. Of particular concern is the lack of consideration on the impact on local residents: drivers now see York, Dudley and Newton roads as potentially attractive cut throughs but residents have extended driving times.

As a result, an iconic scheme has been compromised and widely criticised. The risk is now of losing the wider objective of a largely traffic-free town centre as envisaged in the Town Centre Area Plan. The Town Forum, together with residents, has spent time observing the area before and after the works were completed, with a view to making constructive suggestions for change.

---

<sup>1</sup> One comment was “the council spent hundreds of thousands of pounds making that small stretch of unpedestrianised road into an unpedestrianised road.”

<sup>2</sup> <https://democracy.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/documents/s34502/13%20Appendix%20B%20-%20Initial%20Design%20for%20Discussion.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://democracy.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/documents/s41226/7%20Appendix%20B%20-%20Scheme%20Layout.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://democracy.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/documents/s34501/13%20Appendix%20A%20-%20Concept%20Sketch.pdf>

---

Formed in 2005, the Town Forum is the voice of the 50,000 residents of Royal Tunbridge Wells on issues of common interest

#### Town Forum Management Group

Don Sloan (Chair) Adrian Berendt (Deputy Chair); Jane Fenwick (Transport and Deputy Chair), David Wakefield (Finance); Stuart Anderson (Leisure Wellbeing and Culture); Mark Booker (Strategic Planning); Michael Holman (Water in the Wells)

## Resident-led traffic counts and observations

Residents carried out ten separate observations of the area to:

- (1) Observe changes in traffic patterns after the scheme was implemented; and
- (2) Inform discussion about possible changes to the scheme.

Observations were all at similar times: Fridays at noon for an hour. The first survey (March 2019) was performed before work started. The next four (Dec-19 and Jan, Feb & Mar 2020) were after work was finished, but before COVID impacted. The last five were in Dec-20 (during COVID), Oct-22 and Feb, Mar, May 2023. The first two sessions counted motor vehicles, observed driver behaviour and estimated pedestrian numbers; later sessions included more formal pedestrian counts.

Note: findings are indicative rather than scientific.

The key objective now is to maximise the scheme benefits (safer and more attractive for pedestrians; fewer motor vehicles) and minimise the shortcomings (York and Dudley roads as cut throughs, unsafe crossing at Monson Road). We suggest a further short observation period with more formal traffic and pedestrian counts followed by recommendations from TWBC / KCC to the next Joint Transportation Board. While some changes might need longer consideration, others, such as the Monson Road crossing, need a solution anyway and should be progressed more quickly.

## Summary findings

Until enforcement started in March 2023, the number of vehicles (216) seen in the area had decreased by c. 50% compared with the first pre-scheme count in March 2019: still too high to make it truly a “Public Realm”. Following enforcement, the numbers dropped further and are now 25% of previous volumes. Of those, 2/3 are permitted, as they are exiting along Monson Road from York, Dudley and Newton roads. Of the 43 remaining vehicles seen in the restricted area around the War Memorial, some might be exempt.

With the exception of December 2020, where COVID likely affected pedestrian numbers, the ratio of pedestrians to motor vehicles averaged over 6:1.

The reduction of vehicles is in the restricted area around the War Memorial. The number of vehicles using Newton, Dudley and York roads is unchanged and these are now bearing a higher share of movements. Residents in Dudley and York roads fear they will become vehicle cut-throughs, as drivers seek ways to avoid the restricted area.

## Conclusion and recommendations

In order to make the scheme successful, further changes are needed. The Town Forum’s **key recommendation** is for a **close monitoring of the scheme** for (say) three months, followed by a **review with proposals for change**. Such a review should include **engagement** to identify the needs of those most affected by the scheme, particularly **town centre residents and businesses**. Possible suggestions include:

- 1) York and Dudley Roads
  - a. Formal counts of vehicle numbers and speeds over the whole day
  - b. Measures to prevent use as a vehicle cut-through, such as:
    - i. Two-way / access only (successful for York Road during construction but may not work long-term)
    - ii. Include more roads within scheme (“except residents; access”)

- iii. Make MPR the exit route for residents (maybe white-listing?)
  - c. Review residential parking permit areas for town centre streets, such as:
    - i. Resident only parking
    - ii. Lower charges in town centre car parks
  - d. Remove “2-way” hazard sign at York Road – see Figure 9
- 2) Monson Road
  - a. Engage with businesses about needs and street-scene improvements: short term – public art, benches etc – and long term, as part of the Town Centre Area Plan
  - b. Remove Monson Way entrance to Town Hall carpark
  - c. Reduce motor vehicle access either at Monson Way, Newton Road or at Calverley Rd
  - d. Improve crossing point at Mount Pleasant (immediate solution required)**
- 3) Mount Pleasant Road
  - a. Remove centre lines
  - b. Narrow Monson Road junction – model temporarily with planters
  - c. Open up vista into Fiveways by remodelling ‘bus gate’ (longer term)
- 4) Crescent Road / Church Road
  - a. Redo road markings on Crescent Road to discourage right turn into MPR**
  - b. Investigate signal priorities to reduce wait time for pedestrians.
- 5) Inner London Road
  - a. Include residents in consultation about wider implications of scheme
  - b. Measures to prevent ILR being used by traffic to avoid the A26/Church Road lights

Some items could be done immediately; others need longer consideration. Illustrations of some recommendations appear below.

## Detailed findings

Many observations were noted as early as December 2019. In summary, while the number of motor vehicles has reduced around the War Memorial, a similar drop has not been observed in vehicles using Dudley, York and Newton roads.

- The number of vehicles seen in one hour fell from 459 in March 2019 to 200-250 in subsequent pre-enforcement counts and, following enforcement, 122 vehicles were counted, including 43 were in the restricted area on Mount Pleasant Road. While the reduction has, as envisaged, 'improved the experience for pedestrians and cyclists', many issues still remain.
- We saw many fewer cars than people on foot: a ratio of between 1:4 and 1:9, with between 1,000 and 1,800 each per hour.
- The overall drop in vehicles between MPR and MR is not mirrored on other roads.
- Although the overall number of vehicles using York, Dudley and Newton roads is little changed, the increased overall share might indicate that people are using YR more to get to MR / Camden Road. Further observations could confirm whether this problem increases.
- Driving is mostly considerate, but some still drive too fast for the location, particularly at the Monson Road crossing.
- While we observed few buses and few people using them, counts were not performed at peak time. More detailed statistics on bus usage on MPR should be sought. On no occasions would buses would have been impeded by a narrower road, confirming earlier requests from the Town Forum to minimise the carriageway width. This is a missed opportunity and further engagement with bus companies is requested about a future narrowing of the carriageway as soon as funding becomes available.
- We observed various odd manoeuvres:
  - U-turns in the middle of MPR from drivers coming from Crescent Road, dropping passengers and then exiting the same way!
  - Driver going north through bus gate, trying to turn left into Dudley Road
- Drivers use NR and MR as a circulation route, probably dropping people off on one or other of those roads. During one of the counts the same vehicle was seen four times, in different directions using Mount Pleasant, Monson, Crescent, Dudley and York roads
- Behaviour of pedestrians varied. While some hesitated crossing York and Dudley roads, the problem was greater on Monson Road and we witnessed several vehicles 'pushing through'. While they did not endanger pedestrians, 'right' had to give way to 'might' on numerous occasions and made pedestrians feel unsafe using the crossing. During the most recent (May-23) observation, drivers seem to be giving way more often and pedestrians appear more confident.
- Some drivers from DR/NR slowed at the southbound entrance to MPR (near Prezzo) and seemed confused; others drove straight across, ignoring the give way markings and a couple of near misses were observed with vehicles turning left from MR to MPR.
- Although we some vehicles driving through Fiveways, that restriction is mostly obeyed.
- Some drivers using MR hesitated at Monson Way and some turned there. Others carried on, some hesitating at MPR, seemingly confused by the no entry sign near YR.

### **Dudley Road observations**

- While there is little change in vehicle numbers, most drivers now exit along MR.
- Much of Dudley Road traffic seems to be drivers seeking to park; delivering; disabled drivers parking and not necessarily people travelling across town.
- During one count, we observed two vehicles parked ON the pavement, including one displaying a disabled parking badge.
- On the approach to the junction with MPR, there's no indication to drivers that they are entering a public realm with the expectation that they should give way to pedestrians.
- The implied 'zebra' by Wetherspoons is hard to see and not always observed by drivers.
- Pedestrians generally seem to feel harassed while crossing the public realm and hurry, as if guilty for holding up the traffic - even elderly people with walking aids.
- Around a third of drivers did not signal to indicate that they were turning left into Monson Rd - making the crossing more hazardous for pedestrians.
- Noticed two close calls between vehicles turning left out of Monson Rd into MPR and vehicles sailing straight on to MPR across the give way markings.

### **York Road observations**

- In early counts there was an equal split of vehicles using MR and MPR. 90% now use MR. Some hesitated as if unsure as to permissions. Delivery drivers didn't hesitate at all.
- Many drivers use YR as a dropping off point, or a waiting area outside NW Bank while a passenger popped to shops.
- Many pedestrians crossing YR seemed unsure as to their right of way.
- A few cars crossing to MR entangled with cars going straight on from NR towards MPR.
- Cars using YR varied in speeds. Some, mainly taxis and delivery drivers clearly faster than 20mph. Others crawled down YR looking for parking spaces, some speeding up as they came to the junction. Feb-23 and Mar-23 – taxis sped across junction and into Monson Road
- A resident was stopped in York Road by a concerned van driver clearly confused about what to do when he reached the junction of YR and MPR.

### **Newton Road observations**

- In March 2019, the split of vehicles exiting along MPR/MR was 50:50; now 90% turn left into MR. It seems that many drivers use NR / MR as a circulation route.
- 1 car seen southbound coming through Fiveways
- 15 buses observed coming from Church Road towards FiveWays, including 4 empty and others turned into MR
- 24 buses came from Fiveways towards MPR including 3 empty and another 2 not in service

## Observations on signs

- The road markings on Crescent Road imply that turning right is allowed. The reason for the right turn lane is to prevent congestion at the junction, but that only occurs during the day, when no right turn is permitted. Better would be a left turn lane and a straight on lane. While there is an argument that there is no prohibition on traffic turning right during the evening, there is no reason to encourage it and, in any case, there are fewer motor vehicles at that time
- At the end of York Road there is a two-way sign. Given that this is a 20mph area, there is no need for the sign and it can be confusing, as it implies that a right turn is acceptable. The prohibition sign is also confusing. To the left it indicates “no motor vehicles, except...”; to the right it says “the following area allowed...”.
- It has been observed that the signs from Calverley Road and Camden Road towards Monson Road and Mount Pleasant Road are ‘unclear’, resulting in comments such as “do you have to do a u-turn in the middle of Monson Road?” In fact, as the photos below show, drivers would have to pass 3 “no entry” signs before they reach the one on Mount Pleasant Road itself.
- However, there are a multiplicity of signs and street furniture which should be reviewed and removed where possible.

Figure 1: motor vehicle trend by route

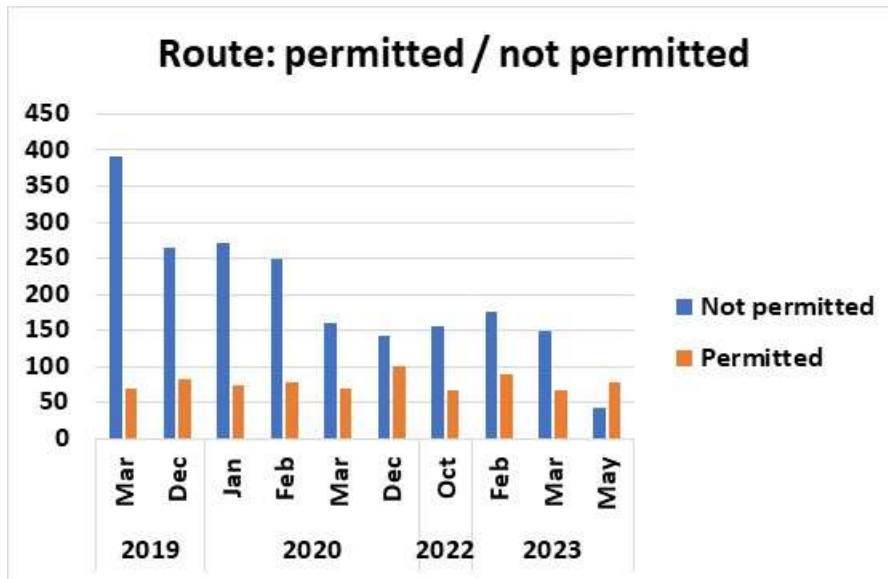
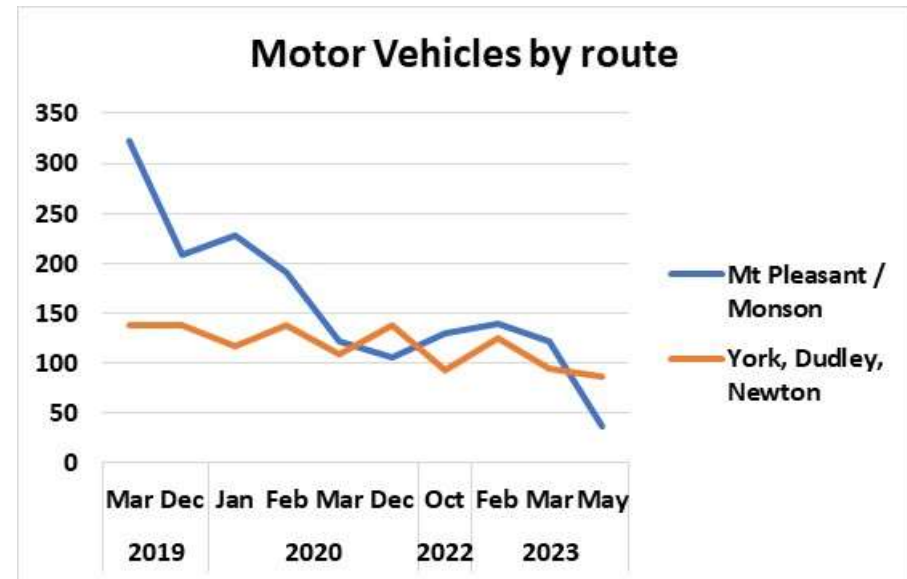


Figure 2: volumes permitted / not permitted



**Figure 3: “permitted” / “not permitted”**

| Date | Not permitted            |                          |                        |                          |                          | Permitted              |                        |                      | Grand Total |
|------|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|-------------|
|      | Dudley Rd to Mt Pleasant | Newton Rd to Mt Pleasant | York Rd to Mt Pleasant | Monson Rd to Mt Pleasant | Mt Pleasant to Monson Rd | Dudley Rd to Monson Rd | Newton Rd to Monson Rd | York Rd to Monson Rd |             |
| Mar  | 19                       | 22                       | 27                     | 119                      | 203                      | 25                     | 23                     | 21                   | 459         |
| Dec  | 25                       | 12                       | 18                     | 125                      | 84                       | 30                     | 26                     | 27                   | 347         |
| Jan  | 17                       | 12                       | 15                     | 77                       | 150                      | 28                     | 26                     | 19                   | 344         |
| Feb  | 19                       | 21                       | 20                     | 94                       | 96                       | 21                     | 27                     | 30                   | 328         |
| Mar  | 14                       | 11                       | 15                     | 65                       | 56                       | 24                     | 17                     | 27                   | 229         |
| Dec  | 9                        | 10                       | 18                     | 53                       | 53                       | 35                     | 27                     | 39                   | 244         |
| Oct  | 4                        | 4                        | 18                     | 59                       | 70                       | 26                     | 16                     | 24                   | 221         |
| Feb  | 7                        | 10                       | 18                     | 53                       | 87                       | 30                     | 24                     | 35                   | 264         |
| Mar  | 13                       | 7                        | 7                      | 60                       | 62                       | 17                     | 15                     | 35                   | 216         |
| May  | 3                        | 1                        | 3                      | 19                       | 17                       | 23                     | 19                     | 37                   | 122         |

| Years              | Date | Motor vehicle | Pedestrian    | MV : Ped ratio |
|--------------------|------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| 2019               | Mar  | 459           |               | NA             |
|                    | Dec  | 347           |               | NA             |
| 2020               | Jan  | 344           | 1,365         | 1 : 4          |
|                    | Feb  | 328           | 1,908         | 1 : 6          |
|                    | Mar  | 229           | 1,764         | 1 : 8          |
|                    | Dec  | 244           | 840           | 1 : 3          |
| 2022               | Oct  | 221           | 1,845         | 1 : 8          |
| 2023               | Feb  | 264           | 1,794         | 1 : 7          |
|                    | Mar  | 216           | 965           | 1 : 4          |
|                    | May  | 122           | 1,107         | 1 : 9          |
| <b>Grand Total</b> |      | <b>2,774</b>  | <b>11,588</b> | <b>1 : 6</b>   |

**Figure 4: Ratio of motor vehicles to pedestrians**



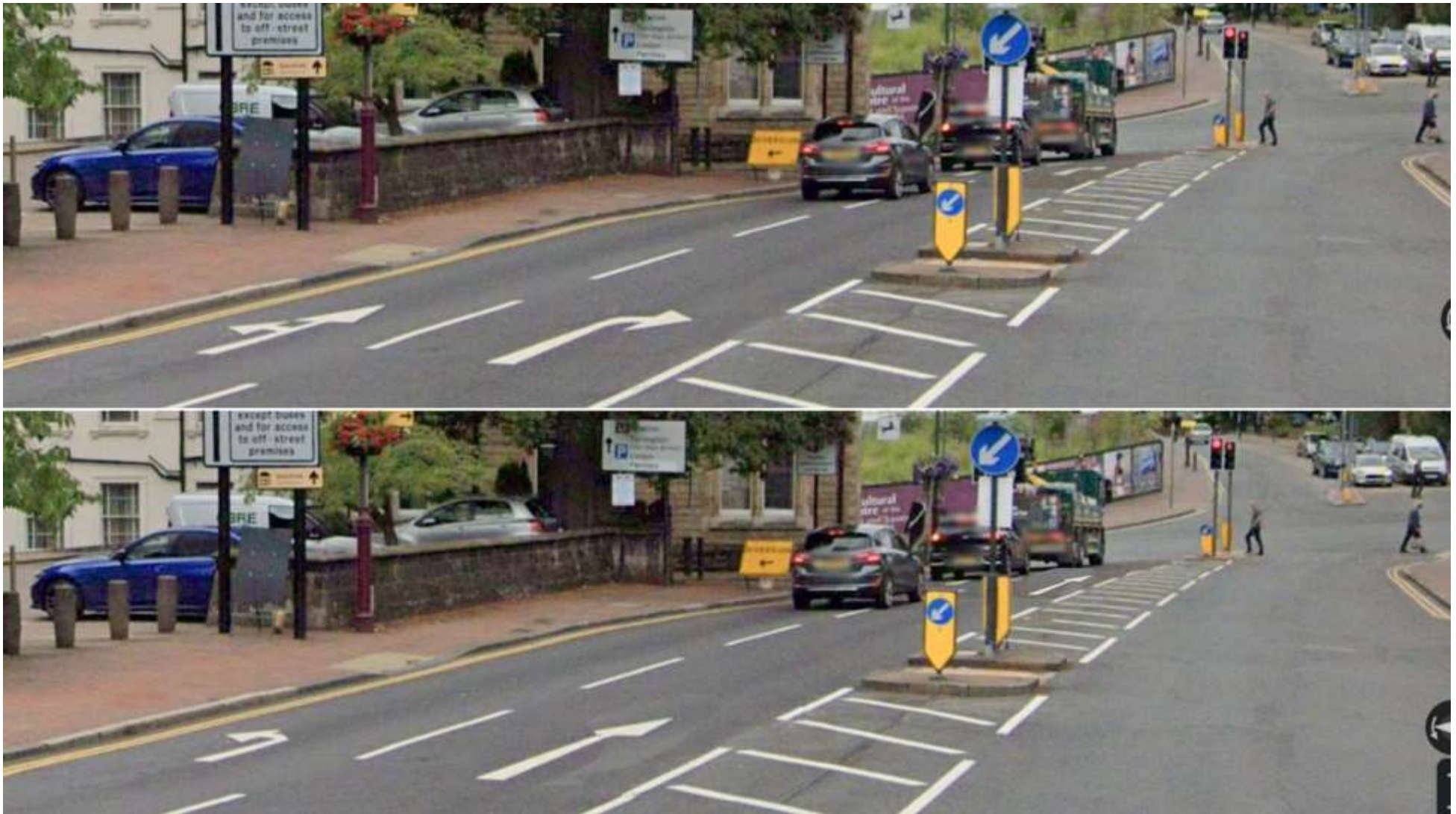
**Figure 5: Detailed survey results (March 2019 – May 2023)**

|  | 1. 01-Mar-19<br>12:10 - 13:10 |            | 2. 20-Dec-19<br>11:35 - 12:35 |            | 3. 24-Jan-20<br>11:15 - 12:15 |            | 4. 14-Feb-20<br>11:40 - 12:40 |            | 5. 03-Mar-20<br>11:30 - 12:30 |            | 6. 18-Dec-20<br>11:30 - 12:30 |            | 7. 28-Oct-22<br>11:40 - 12:40 |            | 8. 17-Feb-23<br>12:00 - 13:00 |            | 9. 17-Mar-23<br>12:00 - 13:00 |            | 10. 12-May-23<br>12:00 - 13:00 |            |
|--|-------------------------------|------------|-------------------------------|------------|-------------------------------|------------|-------------------------------|------------|-------------------------------|------------|-------------------------------|------------|-------------------------------|------------|-------------------------------|------------|-------------------------------|------------|--------------------------------|------------|
| Mt Pleasant to Monson Rd                   | 203                           | 44%        | 84                            | 24%        | 150                           | 44%        | 96                            | 29%        | 56                            | 24%        | 53                            | 22%        | 70                            | 32%        | 87                            | 33%        | 62                            | 29%        | 17                             | 14%        |
| Monson Rd to Mt Pleasant                   | 119                           | 26%        | 125                           | 36%        | 77                            | 22%        | 94                            | 29%        | 65                            | 28%        | 53                            | 22%        | 59                            | 27%        | 53                            | 20%        | 60                            | 28%        | 19                             | 16%        |
| <b>Mt Pleasant / Monson Road</b>           | <b>322</b>                    | <b>70%</b> | <b>209</b>                    | <b>60%</b> | <b>227</b>                    | <b>66%</b> | <b>190</b>                    | <b>58%</b> | <b>121</b>                    | <b>53%</b> | <b>106</b>                    | <b>43%</b> | <b>129</b>                    | <b>58%</b> | <b>140</b>                    | <b>53%</b> | <b>122</b>                    | <b>56%</b> | <b>36</b>                      | <b>30%</b> |
| York Rd                                    | 48                            | 10%        | 45                            | 13%        | 34                            | 10%        | 50                            | 15%        | 42                            | 18%        | 57                            | 23%        | 42                            | 19%        | 53                            | 20%        | 42                            | 19%        | 40                             | 33%        |
| Dudley Rd                                  | 44                            | 10%        | 55                            | 16%        | 45                            | 13%        | 40                            | 12%        | 38                            | 17%        | 44                            | 18%        | 30                            | 14%        | 37                            | 14%        | 30                            | 14%        | 26                             | 21%        |
| Newton Rd                                  | 45                            | 10%        | 38                            | 11%        | 38                            | 11%        | 48                            | 15%        | 28                            | 12%        | 37                            | 15%        | 20                            | 9%         | 34                            | 13%        | 22                            | 10%        | 20                             | 16%        |
| <b>Total vehicles (ex buses)</b>           | <b>459</b>                    |            | <b>347</b>                    |            | <b>344</b>                    |            | <b>328</b>                    |            | <b>229</b>                    |            | <b>244</b>                    |            | <b>221</b>                    |            | <b>264</b>                    |            | <b>216</b>                    |            | <b>122</b>                     |            |
| YR/DR/NR                                   | 137                           | 30%        | 138                           | 40%        | 117                           | 34%        | 138                           | 42%        | 108                           | 47%        | 138                           | 57%        | 92                            | 42%        | 124                           | 47%        | 94                            | 44%        | 86                             | 70%        |
| <b>Pedestrians</b>                         |                               |            |                               |            | <b>1,365</b>                  |            | <b>1,908</b>                  |            | <b>1,764</b>                  |            | <b>840</b>                    |            | <b>1,845</b>                  |            | <b>1,794</b>                  |            | <b>965</b>                    |            | <b>1,107</b>                   |            |
| <b>Ratio motor vehicles to pedestrians</b> |                               |            |                               |            | <b>1 : 4</b>                  |            | <b>1 : 5.8</b>                |            | <b>1 : 7.7</b>                |            | <b>1 : 3.4</b>                |            | <b>1 : 8.3</b>                |            | <b>1 : 6.8</b>                |            | <b>1 : 4.5</b>                |            | <b>1 : 9.1</b>                 |            |

Figure 6: Narrow Monson Road / Mount Pleasant junction



Figure 7: Road markings on Crescent Rd: current and proposed



**Figure 9: Remove “two-way sign”**






Is it necessary to have such signs where the speed limit is 20mph?

Figure 10: Open up Fiveways vista



**Figure 11: No entry warning signs**

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <p>Camden Road</p>  A street view of Camden Road showing a junction with a 'No Entry' warning sign on the left side of the road. | <p>Calverley Road</p>  A street view of Calverley Road with a 'No Entry' warning sign on the right side of the road.              | <p>Monson Road (1)</p>  A street view of Monson Road (1) showing a 'No Entry' warning sign on the right side of the road. |
| <p>Monson Road (1)</p>  A street view of Monson Road (1) showing a 'No Entry' warning sign on the left side of the road.        | <p>Mount Pleasant Road</p>  A street view of Mount Pleasant Road showing a 'No Entry' warning sign on the left side of the road. |  |

## Appendix: Scheme timeline.

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| April 2018            | Final scheme approved  |
| March 2019            | Town Forum traffic observation 1                             |
| April 2019            | Work on scheme started (York Road closed to through traffic) |
| October 2019          | Scheme works complete  |
| December 2019         | Town Forum traffic observation 2                             |
| March 2020            | Enforcement starts   |
| ?Summer 2020          | Enforcement suspended  |
| January – March 2020  | Town Forum traffic observations 3 – 5                        |
| March 2020            | COVID lockdown starts  |
| Autumn 2020           | Signs changed  |
| December 2020         | Town Forum traffic observation 6                             |
| October 2022          | Town Forum traffic observation 7                             |
| February 2023         | Start of informal enforcement – warning notices only         |
| February – March 2023 | Town Forum traffic observation 8-9                           |
| April 2023            | Full enforcement recommenced                                 |

### Comment from Culverden resident when crossing Monson Road 4<sup>th</sup> May 2023 at 6:20pm

- *A pedestrian started crossing from the Prezzo side and got to the middle of the road. At that point, there was a car coming from the opposite direction meaning she wasn't able to cross to the other side - she stepped back to avoid being hit by that car, only for another car to now be behind her on the first side of the road - it had come from around the corner by Prezzo. So she almost got hit by that car, and was left waiting in the middle of the road.*
- *A second pedestrian then had exactly the same thing happen to her, crossing from the Amelia side.*
- *This morning at approx 9.15am as I went to cross, I had to wait for a delivery van doing a U-turn on the raised paving section on the Monson Rd crossing, presumably as he had noticed the road restrictions sign.*

*The reason I mention these points is that I think they call into question KCC's approach of waiting to see how the enforcement goes. In particular:*

- *The two near-misses last night were outside the hours of the restrictions. Pedestrians still need to cross Monson Rd outside 9am-6pm, at which point there are no restrictions at all, but still plenty of traffic. So reduced traffic between 9-6 makes no difference at this time of day - for anyone crossing outside the restricted hours, the road is now fundamentally more dangerous than before the changes, due to the loss of the island. Waiting to see how the enforcement goes will make no difference to this at all.*
- *The raised paving area has introduced ambiguity into this crossing point - it gives pedestrians the impression it is a safe crossing point, so they may take less care crossing. assuming they have priority, but for drivers, it is still a road and not a formal pedestrian crossing (eg zebra-crossing). I can't see any special treatment for raised crossings in the Highway code: <https://www.highwaycodeuk.co.uk/pedestrian-crossings.html>. (This is similar to the "pseudo" zebra crossings by Pret and the Opera House - they give the impression of being zebra crossings with the light/dark paving stones, but actually aren't - so again, there is ambiguity - pedestrians think they are zebra crossings, but for drivers, they don't look like normal zebra crossing (no lights etc) so quite often they are ignored - I know this from personal experience after nearly being hit myself a few years ago). Adding ambiguity to road crossings feels like a very bad idea.*
- *Poor design of the road restrictions - I can't think of any other example where road restrictions come into force midway along a road, forcing drivers to make a U-turn to abide by them. In any other design I can think of, there is always an "escape" route, ie another road you can drive away down. eg outside the post office, to avoid the restrictions turning left into Grosvenor Rd, you can drive right past KFC etc. A lot of drivers will also make this assumption, only to find they have nowhere to go, and are then forced to make a U-turn. Unfortunately, to make this even worse, the point at which they are forced to make the U-turn is the Monson Rd raised crossing point - again, adding extra risk to pedestrians. Whilst the enforcement will reduce traffic flow in the area hopefully, the risk will always remain for pedestrians due to this poor design (as there will always be drivers using the road who are unfamiliar with the restrictions, eg visitors, or delivery drivers, as per my example this morning).*

*I believe the three points could be used to contest KCC's approach to waiting to see how the enforcement goes. I appreciate there isn't likely to be much in the KCC budget for this, but I'm afraid this is a problem of their own making and it feels like they should be obliged to fix it. Hopefully restoring the central island would be in the £10ks as opposed to £100ks. If it is then restored, potentially the design of the restrictions could also be revisited.*