

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND GROWTH****DATE: 28 MARCH 2023****LEAD OFFICER: KATIE STEWART – EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE****SUBJECT: WALNUT TREE CLOSE, GUILDFORD – ONE-WAY SYSTEM AND CYCLE LANE****SURREY**

ORGANISATION STRATEGY GROWING A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY SO EVERYONE CAN BENEFIT/ TACKLING HEALTH INEQUALITY/ENABLING A
PRIORITY AREA: GREENER FUTURE/EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES/ROAD SAFETY

SUMMARY OF ISSUE:

The purpose of this report is to recommend a decision as to whether to make the southbound closure of Walnut Tree Close in Guildford permanent, following a period of implementing the proposal as a trial, and the associated review of traffic and air quality data along with resident and stakeholder feedback. The recommendation included in this report is to make the closure permanent. This will return Walnut Tree Close to its original state as a local road providing access to businesses and residents and not as a commuter rat-run route to Guildford Station. Air quality will also be improved with the associated reduction in traffic along Walnut Tree Close.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that the Cabinet Member agrees to make the one-way system trial along Walnut Tree Close permanent.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Following a second trial which was undertaken from 29th May 2022 to 30th November 2022, it has been demonstrated by the data collected during this period that there has been no detrimental impact on traffic or air quality from the trial, and the one-way system achieves most of the objectives set for the scheme, it is recommended that the changes are made permanent.

DETAILS:**Background**

2. The scheme is part of the Guildford Town Centre Master Plan, which aims to create a more attractive pedestrian environment, reconnecting the town

centre to the river and creating a sequence of appealing streets and spaces, redefining the Guildford resident and visitor experience.

3. The scheme will also deliver against the objectives in Surrey's Local Transport Plan (LTP4) to prioritise walking and cycling over less sustainable modes through the delivery of facilities which make active travel more convenient, pleasant and safe.
4. The scheme originated from a petition in 2013 that was created by residents on Walnut Tree Close and gained 342 signatures at the time. The petition stated that residents experienced noise from HGVs and water ingress caused by having low thresholds again caused by HGVs displacing standing water. Other issues included in the 2013 petition were accidents and damage caused to parked cars due to narrow lanes and 2-way traffic. The link to the full committee report and minutes can be found here:

<https://mycouncil.surreycc.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=196&MId=3031&Ver=4>

5. In order to respond to the concerns raised by residents, Surrey County Council implemented an experimental Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) for this one-way trial, which allows local traffic authorities to implement traffic controls on their roads.
6. A temporary southbound closure of Walnut Tree Close, Guildford was initially implemented on 29 November 2020 and ran until 17 February 2021. Alongside the closure, a segregated cycle lane was created on both sides of the road to provide a safer and more attractive route for cyclists which was in line with Surrey's LTP4 objectives and also compliant with LTN 1/20 which is the standard required by the Department for Transport (DfT).
7. The aim of the trial was to reduce the amount of traffic using the road, particularly vehicles that use the road as a through route between the A25 and the town centre gyratory. The trial sought to:
 - a. Reduce peak-hour queuing along Walnut Tree Close;
 - b. Improve safety for all road users;
 - c. Reduce the conflict between traffic exiting Walnut Tree Close and the gyratory; and
 - d. Create a more pleasant environment along Walnut Tree Close to encourage more walking and cycling
8. The initial trial period was meant to be in place for 6 months; however, it had to be completed prior to the start date of separate works on Walnut Bridge. The one-way trial was removed to accommodate the Walnut Bridge works that commenced on 18 February 2021. The road was reinstated to full two-way operation at that point. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic reducing travel and a national lockdown being imposed during the first trial period, Surrey County Council was not able to obtain sufficiently robust data on changes to travel pattern resulting from the trial to assess the benefit of the trial.

9. A post-pandemic repeat of the trial was implemented on 29 May 2022 and ran until 30 Nov 2022.

Results of the trial

10. The effect of the trial was measured by a number of means. This included collecting traffic data along Walnut Tree Close, Woodbridge Road and Stoke Road, as well as collecting Air Quality data on Walnut Tree Close and Woodbridge Road. The views of residents and stakeholders on Walnut Tree Close trial were also obtained, which are summarised alongside traffic data from the trial in the report.

Traffic impacts

11. Traffic data was collected both before the trial in 2019 and during the second trial in 2022 to help inform the impact of the trial on traffic rerouting due to the one-way system.
12. The data on traffic impacts showed that southbound traffic on the A322 Woodbridge Road increased by 100 to 200 cars over 24 hours on weekdays between 2019 and the second trial 2022. However, this impact on the A322 was within the limits of typical daily fluctuation and would not be discernible to other road users.
13. The traffic data does not show an increase in southbound traffic on the A320 as a result of the trial being in place. In fact, vehicle volumes were found to have decreased on the A320 during the trial in comparison to the 2019 baseline.

Pedestrian and cycle surveys

14. Surrey County Council conducted pedestrian and cycle surveys before the trial in October 2019 and also during the trial in May/July/September 2022.
15. The timing of the trials meant that the pre-trial survey was undertaken when the University was in session, whilst the mid-trial survey was undertaken during the summer – meaning there is an external effect not related to the trial itself that needs to be factored into any assessment of the survey data. As a result, overall pedestrian numbers were significantly higher in October 2019 as university was fully in session, whereas the surveys in 2022 showed lighter numbers due to exam periods and completion of the university semester.
16. That said, although overall numbers were lower across the week during the trial, weekend data – when the effect of the University being in session is less dominant as a factor in the usage of the transport network – showed a positive impact from the trial. In fact, walking levels were higher over the weekend in 2022 in comparison to the pre-trial levels in 2019, with an 89% increase in footfall in September 2022 compared to October 2019.
17. As with the pedestrian counts, overall cycling numbers decreased between October 2019 and May 2022. However, cycling levels were higher over the weekends in 2022 in comparison to the pre-trial survey in October 2019. The drop in levels is again likely due to exam periods and completion of the university semester.

18. A more detailed breakdown of the traffic data and pedestrian and cycle counts can be found in Annex 1.
19. On balance, it appears that the trial has led to an increase in walking and cycling activity along Walnut Tree Close. This is because the walking and cycling flows have generally increased between May and September 2022, especially over the weekends where university term time is not a dominant factor, whereas the numbers of vehicles have fallen along Walnut Tree Close. It is likely that when university is in term, that levels will increase further.

Air quality impacts

20. The data on air quality was obtained via diffusion tube monitoring of the nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) levels as part of an annual programme carried out by Guildford Borough Council (GBC). GBC's Regulatory Services provided SCC with their feedback on the impact of the trial and suggested that the trial had some positive benefit to air quality, and no significant negative change to the routes onto which traffic has been rerouted. An excerpt from their email feedback is included here:

- a. *"The traffic scheme is on one of the feeder roads leading on and off the Guildford Town Centre Air Quality Management Area declared October 2021. Therefore, any initiative to improve vehicle flow is welcomed, the elimination of southern bound traffic queuing and entering the gyratory was of interest."*
- b. *"Monitoring from July to November 2023 in Walnut Tree Close appeared to show a slight reduction in levels compared with historic data. Furthermore, there has not been any significant change in the levels monitored on the rerouted approaches of both Woodbridge and Stoke Roads. The time period covered is somewhat shorter than is recommended by Defra, hence Guildford Borough Council continue to monitor these locations and will provide a full year's profile in August 2023."*

Public consultation

21. A public consultation was undertaken during June and July 2016, during which the public were asked to express their preferred option as part of their consultation response. The three presented options were:
 - a. Option 1 – Closure to all through traffic
 - b. Option 2 – One-way traffic restriction upon southbound vehicles
 - c. Option 3 – Neither option 1 nor 2
22. A total of 630 responses were received and the results indicated that there was a broadly even split amongst all questionnaire respondents over which option they would like to see delivered, with roughly one third each supporting 'Option 1', 'Option 2' and 'Neither Option 1 nor Option 2'. From these responses it can be inferred that the majority of respondents (63%) expressed support for some level of restriction to through-traffic along Walnut Tree Close.

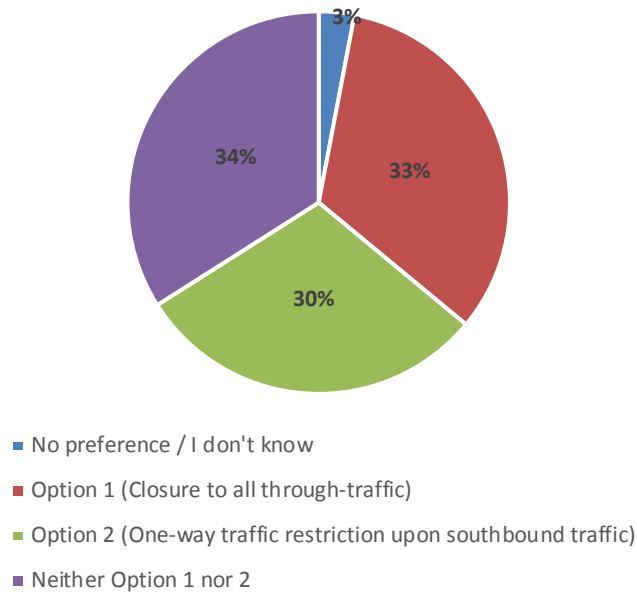


Figure 1 Responses to 2016 public consultation

23. Upon commencing the second trial, a dedicated email address was made available for the public to feedback their thoughts. A total of 195 responses were received during this second trial period, with 69% objecting and 31% approving the trial.
24. It should be noted however that of those 195 responses, 123 provided their point of origin, of which 16% were residents, 6% worked on Walnut Tree Close, and the remaining 78% either lived outside of Walnut Tree Close or did not provide an origin and likely to be through traffic. Traffic that previously would have used Walnut Tree Close as a through-route is mitigated by the fact that they are still able to access the station and Guildford town centre via alternate routes, including Woodbridge Road, Stoke Road, A3100 London Road and also The Chase.

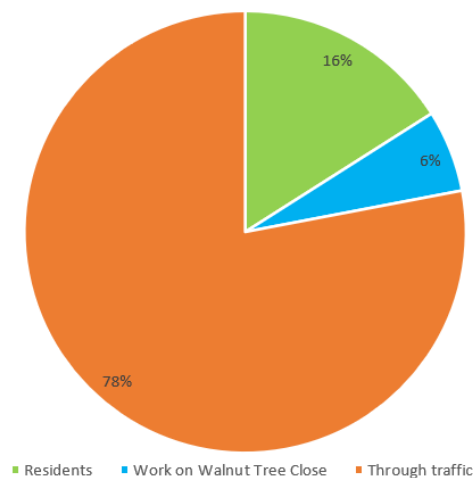


Figure 2 Response breakdown

25. Of the responses that were residents, 81% were in support of the scheme and 19% objected. Out of the responses from those who worked on Walnut Tree Close, 100% objected. Of those who lived outside Walnut Tree Close or did not provide a point of origin, 75% objected and 25% supported the scheme.
26. Surrey County Council also conducted face to face surveys of pedestrians and cyclists along Walnut Tree Close on the 29th of November 2022. In this survey, users were asked whether they would like to see the trial made permanent. Of a total of 65 responses, 85% said they would like the trial to become permanent, 5% said they would not want the trial to be permanent, with the remaining 10% saying they had no opinion on the trial.

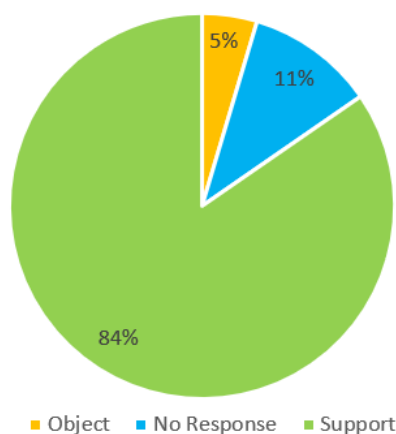


Figure 3 Pedestrian/cyclists survey responses

27. Surrey County Council conducted face to face surveys with businesses situated on Walnut Tree Close in December 2022, where businesses were asked whether they would like the trial to be made permanent. A total of 28 businesses were contacted, with 39% objecting to the scheme. The remaining 61% either did not respond or had no opinion on the scheme.
28. Surrey County Council also conducted an onsite walk-through with Surrey Coalition Disabled Group who expressed their support to the scheme while also identifying areas where improvements could be made to improve accessibility to their users.
29. On balance, the responses received show that the scheme has the support of residents and will continue to encourage active travel in the area, thereby supporting the objectives of the scheme.
30. Across all data assessed from the trial, following consideration of the traffic & air quality data sets and the engagement & consultation responses received, it is believed that the trialled one-way & cycle lane changes contribute positively to the original aims of the scheme and both the County Council's and Borough Council's future aspirations on air quality reduction. The scheme also supports Surrey's Sustainable Travel Hierarchy as set out in Surrey's LTP4 which provides a decision-making framework to prioritise active travel measures to increase levels of walking and cycling.

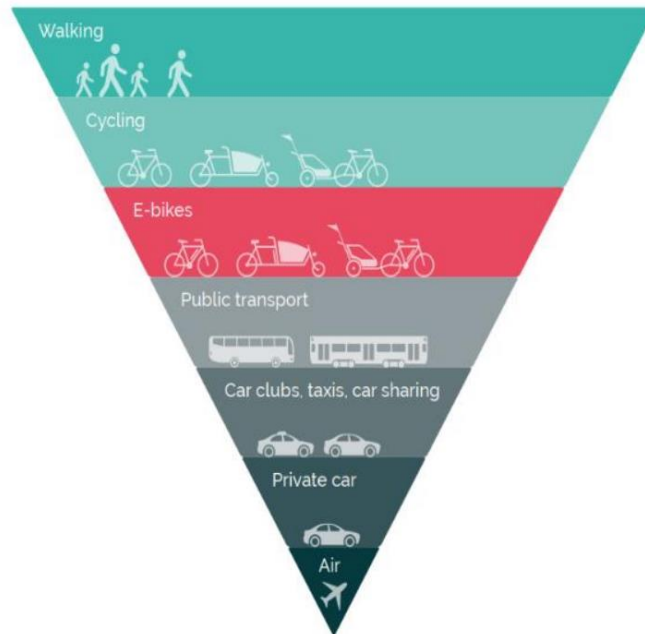


Figure 4 Sustainable Travel Hierarchy

CONSULTATION:

31. A public consultation was held in 2016 prior to the trial commencing. A separate stakeholder engagement session was also held in 2020 to explain what the trial would entail and to seek feedback from attendees.
32. Residents and stakeholders were consulted again in 2022 on the trial held by Surrey County Council, this included obtaining the views of:
 - a. Guildford Borough Councillors: Angela Goodwin, Tom Hunt and Cait Taylor.
 - b. Guildford G-Bug (Letter of support included in Annex 2)
 - c. University of Surrey
 - d. Residents on Walnut Tree Close (via feedback survey and dedicated email address)
 - e. Businesses on Walnut Tree Close (via stakeholder engagement and feedback survey)
 - f. Pedestrians and Cyclists on Walnut Tree Close (via feedback survey)
 - g. Commuters who park at Guildford station (via feedback survey)
 - h. Surrey Coalition of Disabled People
33. Surrey County Council posted a dedicated email address walnuttreeclose.trial@surreycc.gov.uk for any stakeholder or interested party to provide feedback during the trial.

34. A webpage was created on the Council's website providing an overview of the scheme and the process. This included details of why we were doing the trial and updates in relation to the progress of the trial and decision making. The link to the webpage is:

<https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/roadworks-and-maintenance/roadworks/walnut-tree-close-guildford-one-way-system>

RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:

35. The proposals to make Walnut Tree Close a one-way system and cycle lane responds to Surrey County Council's LTP4 objectives. This will return Walnut Tree Close to its original state as a local road providing access to businesses and residents and not as a commuter rat-run route to Guildford Station.
36. Drivers who would not be able to use Walnut Tree Close due to the one-way system will be required to reroute to more suitable alternative routes. The traffic assessments by Surrey County Council confirm that the impacts of this rerouting can be successfully managed by the local road network in Guildford.
37. The one-way scheme was constructed as part of the trial and is currently still in operation. The existing infrastructure is sufficient to enable the one-way trial to be made permanent. There are no road safety risks which have been identified. Surrey County Council will be monitoring this scheme and will implement changes as required to further improve safety for all road users.

Financial and value for money implications:

38. The costs of the improvements are jointly funded by the County Council and the EM3 Local Enterprise Partnership.
39. This scheme has been delivered under budget, and there are no additional financial implications if the scheme is made permanent. There are no significant additional infrastructure costs other than the cost of new traffic orders to make the scheme permanent.

Section 151 Officer commentary:

40. Although significant progress has been made to improve the Council's financial position, the financial environment remains challenging. The UK is experiencing the highest levels of inflation for decades, putting significant pressure on the cost of delivering our services. Coupled with continued increasing demand and fixed Government funding this requires an increased focus on financial management to ensure we can continue to deliver services within available funding.
41. In addition to these immediate challenges, the medium-term financial outlook beyond 2022/23 remains uncertain. With no clarity on central government funding in the medium term, our working assumption is that financial resources will continue to be constrained, as they have been for the majority of the past decade. This places an onus on the Council to continue to consider issues of financial sustainability as a priority in order to ensure stable provision of services in the medium term.

Legal implications – Monitoring Officer:

42. An experimental traffic regulation order is currently in place. The 1996 Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations provide that an experimental traffic regulation order may be given permanent effect where certain prescribed requirements have been met in relation to the giving of notice, consultation and the handling of objections made. Officers advise that all relevant legal requirements have been met.

Equalities and diversity:

43. The County must abide by its Public Sector Equality Duty (s149 of the Equality Act 2010) when exercising its public functions. There is a requirement when deciding upon the recommendations to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity for people with protected characteristics, foster good relations between such groups, and eliminate any unlawful discrimination. These matters are dealt with in the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) which was undertaken in October 2020 for the wider Guildford Town Centre Transport Package prior to the trial for Walnut Tree Close commencing. This included Walnut Tree Close although no specific EQIA was carried out for the One Way and Cycle scheme. The EQIA was reviewed prior to the repeat of the trial and also prior to the decision made by the Cabinet Member for Transport, Infrastructure and Growth.
44. The EQIA concludes that, following appropriate consultation, in general the impact of the scheme is anticipated to be positive for the majority of the users of the routes and services in question and the residents of Guildford and the wider area.
45. Officers have engaged with the Surrey Coalition of Disabled Persons who will be asked to attend the site and follow the route to identify any needs that the scheme should meet, with a view to incorporating as many of those suggestions in the advertised scheme as practicable.

Other implications:

46. None

Public Health implications:

47. The proposals meet Council aspirations to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050 (and intermediate 60% reduction by 2035) by reducing motorised vehicle traffic on Walnut Tree Close. It will encourage more travel by active travel modes.
48. The scheme will improve local air quality, traffic noise and impacts on Walnut Tree Close to benefit residents and those travelling by active travel modes.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

49. The approved scheme will be made permanent with no additional infrastructure required. The current infrastructure which was installed as part of the trial will remain in place.
50. The outcome of the decision at this meeting will be reported on the Council's website and all Members will be contacted on the outcome.
51. Residents and businesses will be informed of the decision through Surrey County Council's website of the decision.

Contact Officer:

Lyndon Mendes – Transport Policy Team Manager

Annexes:

Annex 1 – Walnut Tree Close Traffic Data Analysis Report

Annex 2 – Letter of support from G-BUG