

# High Street, Royal Tunbridge Wells – Traffic Regulation Order for One Way Routing

For Joint Transportation Board on 3 July 2023

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## Summary

<b>Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Justine Rutland, Cabinet Member for Economic Development
<b>Lead Director:</b>	Lee Colyer, Director of Finance, Policy and Development (s151)
<b>Head of Service:</b>	David Candlin, Head of Economic Development and Property
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<b>Classification:</b>	Public document (non-exempt)
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	Pantiles & St Marks

## Recommendations

Officer / Committee recommendations as supported by the Portfolio Holder:

1. That the Joint Transport Board considers representations made in response to the public consultation.
2. That, subject to comments made, the Board endorses the making of a permanent Traffic Regulation Order for the northbound one-way restriction in the High Street, Royal Tunbridge Wells between its junctions with Mount Sion and Vale Road.

# 1. Introduction and background

- 1.1 In August 2020, a temporary scheme to support social distancing and outdoor eating and drinking was installed in the High Street, Royal Tunbridge Wells. The scheme comprised one-way routing northbound and temporary barriers and signage. The scheme was funded by the Department for Transport’s Emergency Active Travel Fund and was delivered by Kent County Council (with design input from TWBC).
- 1.2 Following feedback from local residents and businesses, a new design that introduced wooden planters and parklets and new signage, whilst maintaining the one-way routing northbound, was installed in August 2021. The funding for this scheme came from a number of sources including the Government’s Welcome Back Fund, RTWT Business Improvement District (BID) and the KCC Combined Members Grant.
- 1.3 A consultation on the High Street planter and parklet scheme took place in Autumn 2021 to ascertain if there was support for the scheme. 665 responses were received – comprising local businesses (71), local residents (170) and other visitors (424). The charts below provide the headline responses to the consultation.

Figure 1: Responses to question about overall support for the scheme

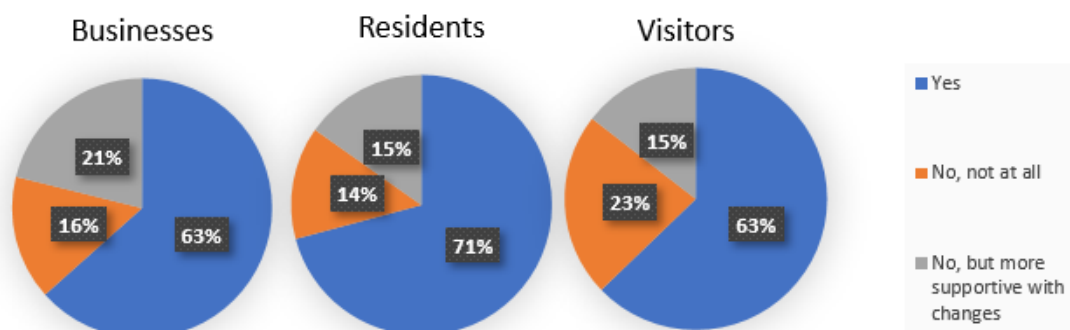
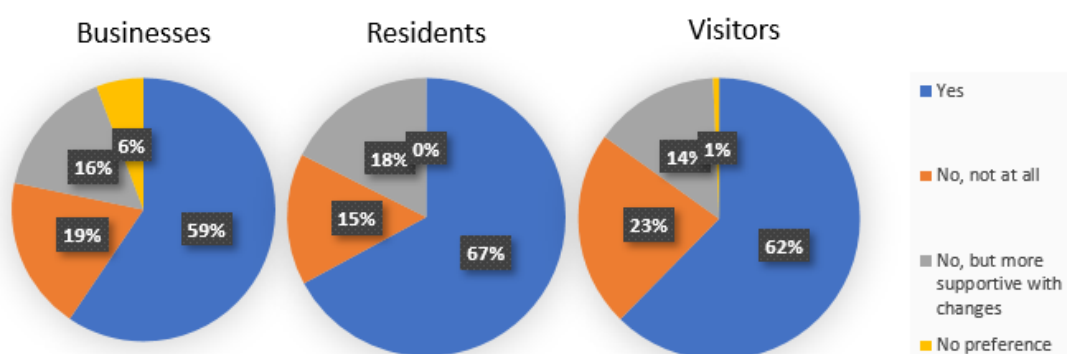


Figure 2: Response to question about support to make scheme permanent



- 1.4 Following this local engagement, the temporary Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) was renewed in March 2022, extending the existing scheme for a further 18 months.

## 2. One-way traffic restriction and operation

- 2.1 The current temporary TRO will expire in September 2023, and the intention is to make the current scheme permanent. A plan of the scheme is included in Appendix A.

- 2.2 The existing scheme and the effect of the Order would be to prohibit vehicles movements (except cycles & exemptions) on the following length of roads in Tunbridge Wells:

HIGH STREET – From its junction with Mount Sion to its junction with Vale Road one way only in a north easterly direction.

FROG LANE, LITTLE MOUNT SION & SOUTH GROVE – At its junctions with High Street all vehicles will only be able to turn right into High Street.

CASTLE STREET & WHITE BEAR PASSAGE – At its junctions with High Street all vehicles will only be able to turn left into High Street.

## 3. 2023 Traffic Regulation Order Consultation

- 3.1 The statutory TRO consultation commenced on 9 June 2023 and will close at noon on Monday 3 July 2023. Details of the proposed Traffic Regulation Order were placed on the Kent County Council (KCC) website and notices have also been posted on site in the roads concerned. Information was also placed on the Council's social media pages and letters were delivered by hand to local residents and businesses advising them of the consultation.

- 3.2 The public consultation closes on the date of the JTB meeting (noon on 3 July) and any further comments will be verbally reported to the Committee. At the time of writing (30 June 2023) KCC has received 48 comments of which 20 are objections and 28 in support.

- 3.3 The 20 objections focus on a number of issues that have been summarised below:
- Direction of one-way routing – 6 objections mentioned amending the one-way routing to southbound rather than the current northbound. In one of the supporting responses the reversal of the one-way routing was also suggested.
  - Impact on feeder roads – 2 objections commented on impact of feeder road and longer journey times as could only travel one direction. One of these objections did state that if the plan was to retain the scheme then extending the pavement and creating permanent space for business should be considered.
  - Traffic Congestion – 6 objections referred to the congestion on adjacent roads, primarily Vale Road. Respondents wished to be able to travel south on the High Street rather than having to use Vale Road to access London Road (A26). Comments ranged from reference to some congestion though to suggestions that

this was causing town centre gridlock. However, the Council has not received many complaints about congestion over the last 3 years and more specifically not in the last 18 months when Covid-19 restrictions have been completely removed. This would suggest that there is not sufficient evidence of a major problem.

- Character of Road – 2 objections focussed on the character of the road.
- Vale Road – 1 comment specifically indicated issues in the ability for pedestrians to cross Vale Road. However, this has always been a difficult location for pedestrians to cross.
- Other – 1 objection primarily focussed on whether the scheme is anti-car without any additional comment, one was opposed to the measures without clarifying, while one objection sought clarity on whether the restrictions were already in place.
- At least 5 responses to the consultation referred or focussed on the Public Realm scheme in the north of the town centre and not the High Street.

3.4 Support for the project was indicated in 28 responses including from Kent Police and RTW Town Forum (resident’s representative group). A number of the supporting comments referred to greater safety for pedestrians and cyclists as well as the improved environment due to fewer vehicles. The better trading environment was commented on, particularly for hospitality businesses in the High Street. Some support was conditional recognising that the current planters and parklets remained temporary in appearance and would require renewal in the near future. Supporters also sought a more permanent approach with widening of the pavement suggested as space for pedestrians remains narrow on the western side as the local businesses are using the extra space for outdoor seating. These comments were similar to those received during the 2021 consultation.

3.5 If the TRO is made permanent it is intended that TWBC will work with KCC Highways and RTW Business Improvement District to agree and deliver upgraded street furniture in the High Street, in response to feedback from businesses and residents, and to ensure that the benefits of the scheme continue in the longer term.

## **4. Recommended Course of Action**

4.1 That the Joint Transport Board considers the representations made in response to the public consultation. And that, subject to comments made, the Board endorses the making of a permanent Traffic Regulation Order for the one-way restriction northbound in the High Street, Royal Tunbridge Wells between its junctions with Mount Sion and Vale Road.

## **5. Appendices and Background Documents**

### **Appendices:**

Appendix A - Plan of High Street, Tunbridge Wells Scheme