

Joint Transportation Board

15 January 2023

Subject: E-petition

1) Remove signage associated with the scheme and allow all traffic to flow freely along Mount Pleasant (Public Realm 2).

2) Waive fines imposed to date.

Head of Service:

KCC: Tim Read Head of Transportation

Cabinet Member:

KCC: Neil Baker Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

Key or Non Key decision: Non Key

Decision Issues:

These matters are within the authority of the KCC Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

Tunbridge Wells ward(s):

Park Ward

St James' Ward

Culverden Ward

Summary and purpose of the report:

This report considers the subject of an E-Petition received by Kent County Council (KCC) regarding the Public Realm 2 restriction in the centre of Tunbridge Wells. 754 electronic signatures were received, accompanied by 331 signatures on a paper petition.

KCC and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) Officers have reviewed the contents of the petition and have laid out their findings and recommendations to the JTB.

To Recommend:

Members of the Board to consider the petition and make a recommendation on how to proceed:

- a) Do nothing (no alterations to the layout in response to the petition).
- b) Retain the Public Realm 2 scheme but incorporate some amendments to help raise further awareness of the restrictions. See Table 2 and Appendix A (drawings)

1. Introduction

1.1 Public Realm 1 has successfully operated in Tunbridge Wells since 2015, restricting traffic flow along the A263 Grosvenor Road between its junctions with Goods Station Road and Mount Pleasant Road, limiting traffic to buses only, daily, from 9 am to 6 pm.

- 1.2 Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Five-Year Plan was committed to further enhancing the public realm in the town centre of Royal Tunbridge Wells to provide a distinctive community space for residents and visitors.
- 1.3 The Council's Corporate Priorities for 2017/18 contained a commitment to develop a Phase 2 scheme around the civic centre complex, with funding from the Local Enterprise Partnership's Local Sustainable Transport Fund Scheme via Kent County Council (£1m) and its own resources (£300,000) which was part of the approved capital programme.
- 1.4 The Public Realm 2 project is a street scene improvement initiative for Mount Pleasant Road, extending from its junction with Monson Road to Church Road Tunbridge Wells. Restricting traffic to buses, taxis and cycles only, 9 am to 6 pm daily.

2. Issues Raised by the Petition and officer responses

- 2.1 Issue: The restrictions on Mount Pleasant between Monson and Church/Crescent Roads fail to meet their published intentions (greener and more prosperous town centre). Similar volumes of traffic are forced onto alternative and narrower residential town centre roads and their junctions (Calverley, Crescent, Church), increasing noise and air pollution, congestion and compromising pedestrian safety on those roads.

Response: There is no data supporting the assertion that PR2 has increased noise, air pollution, congestion or danger to pedestrians on Calverley, Crescent and Church Roads. Mitigating this, Mount Pleasant Road is significantly quieter in terms of traffic flow and has much wider pedestrian areas for ease of movement. The intention of the scheme was to divert traffic along Crescent, Church and Calverley Roads. The crash data over the last 4 years for Crescent Road, Church Road and Calverley Road shows a decline in reported crashes from a combined 7 crashes in 2018 to 3 in 2022. 1 incident has been reported between January 2023 and July 2023 (no further data is available at present).

- 2.2 Issue: Buses and taxis are not able to be restricted in using Mount Pleasant, preventing full implementation of improved pedestrian enjoyment. The widened pavements and reduced carriageways have already achieved this aim in this regard.

Response: The designs catered for keeping Mount Pleasant Road as a bus hub close to the Town Centre and allowing taxis and cyclists through the restrictions. The more open environment along with the reduced traffic volumes allows for a more enjoyable pedestrian and cycling experience especially when crossing Mount Pleasant Road and Monson Road.

- 2.3. Issue: Residents (and other users) of feeder roads (Dudley, York) are forced to undertake unnecessarily lengthy routes, to seek parking near their homes, counter to the greener intent.

Response: The restriction in Mount Pleasant Road does mean that residents of York Road and Dudley Road, during the restricted hours, do need to travel further to re-enter their roads if parking is not found initially. Mitigating this requires further investigation.

- 2.4. Issue: Inadequate signage on feeder roads of above (2.3) and Monson Road, preventing drivers from choosing alternative routes before being committed to observe the Mount Pleasant restrictions.

Response: It is understood that additional signage and other minor adjustments may assist with improving the awareness of the restrictions. Recommendation (b) suggests relatively simple improvements.

- 2.5. Issue: Inadequate signage forcing drivers to undertake u-turns at a pedestrian crossing point on Monson Road, compromising pedestrian safety.

Response: Additional signage and other minor adjustments may assist with improving the awareness of the restrictions. Recommendation (b) suggests relatively simple adjustments. The original designs understood that U Turns in Monson Way may be required, or alternatively, Newton Road and Mount Pleasant Road could be used so vehicles could still access the western end of Monson Road but be facing in the right direction to exit Monson Road rather than having to do a U Turn.

- 2.6. Issue: Confusing signage leading to unwitting lack of compliance with the traffic restrictions.

Response: KCC and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council have, over the last few years, investigated possible improvements to the advanced signing of the restrictions and implemented changes. The restrictions came into force in February 2023 following the introduction of CCTV cameras. Also in February 2023, TWBC commenced a publicity campaign to raise the public’s awareness of the PR2 restriction, including press releases, social media posts, and letter drops to local residents and businesses. TWBC has operated a very sympathetic appeals process throughout enforcement operations and has issued around 20,000 warning notices rather than strictly enforcing them. Since April 2023 there has been a steady decline in vehicles entering the restrictions – see table 1 below:

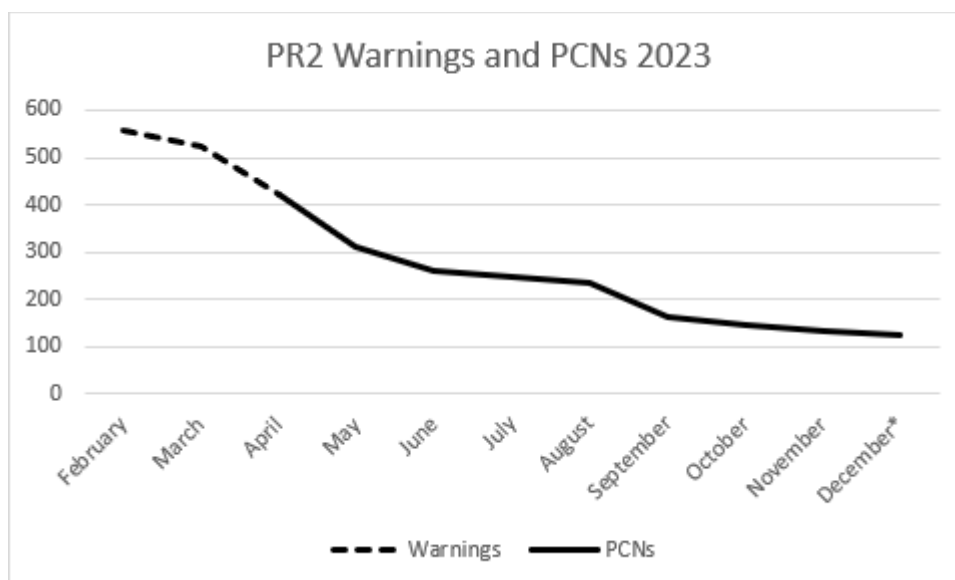


Table 1 – Numbers of Warning Letters and Penalty Charge Notices sent in 2023

Adjudicators are provided with evidence of the infringement, including details of the signs on approaches and entrances to the restriction. In most cases where the appeal is based wholly or partly on the quality of signs, they have decided in favour of the Council and commented that the signs are compliant.

- 2.7 Issue: To avoid restrictions, Dudley/York Roads being used as a short-cut to access Camden Road, increasing the traffic flow on the feeder roads of above.

Response: This short cut was possible previously for drivers using London Road that wanted to bypass Church Road, but it is understood that additional traffic may use these residential roads to access Monson Road and Camden Road.

- 2.8. Issue: Newton Road residents enduring higher volumes of traffic as drivers try to avoid the U-turn on Monson Road.

Response: At the design stage it was understood that Newton Road could receive additional traffic. However, there is no evidence to say that Newton Road is not able to cope with the levels of traffic, the road itself is an important location for vehicles to access and load and unload to the town centre.

3. Option b

- 3.1 The majority of the PCN's have been issued for vehicles entering from the northern end (Monson Road end), twice as many as from the southern approach. Table 2 below suggests additional measures to improve the awareness of the restrictions from all directions. See Appendix A for drawings showing the proposed amendments.
- 3.2 In addition to Option b) a further report will be produced to look at any additional measures to compliment the Public Realm 2 scheme. This report will be brought to a future JTB. KCC has not allocated any funding for further alterations to the existing arrangement.

Table 2 – Option b – Additional Measures to further raise awareness of the restrictions

<p>Option b. See drawing Nos 1.1, 2, 6.1, 4</p>	<p>Maintain existing traffic movements.</p> <p>Add red surfacing to each gateway feature, add more traffic enforcement signs to warn of the restriction.</p> <p>Add 2 "SLOW" text markings approaching the granite raised table on Monson Road.</p> <p>Add an additional enforcement camera sign with a left turn arrow on Calverley Road.</p> <p>TROs not required for this proposal.</p> <p>Cost impact low. (coloured surfacing, road markings, signs)</p>
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4. Implications

Financial

- 4.1 Should option b (Retain the Public Realm 2 scheme with amendments to improve

awareness of the restrictions) be supported and a recommendation to investigate further, detailed designs will be required to acquire estimated costs. All costs incurred in progressing options will need to be funded by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. It is likely that the estimated costs would be around £15,000.

- 4.2 It should be noted that construction costs have been rising rapidly with most construction costs increasing by 30% and in some cases by 60%, there are also very long order times.
- 4.3 These amendments will be funded from Public Realm 2 enforcement income.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 KCC Officer recommendation is to progress with **option b**, to help further awareness of the restrictions.
- 5.3 To implement the removal of signage associated with the scheme and allow all traffic to flow freely along Mount Pleasant (Public Realm 2) as per the petition, is not considered to be an option as the signage removal alone would have the potential for road safety to be compromised. The original designs have relied heavily on reduced traffic numbers to allow features to be installed, such as the removal of central islands on the pedestrian crossing points providing wide unhindered crossings. All Road Safety Audits undertaken to date have been aware of the original aims and objectives of the scheme. A significant redesign would be required with all costs incurred in returning Mount Pleasant Road to its pre 2019 state would need to be funded by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.
- 5.4 To waive fines imposed to date, is also not considered to be an option. The restriction is legally enforceable and Penalty Charges have been lawfully issued, which is supported by the Traffic Penalty Tribunal in their decisions reached in rejecting appeals that they have considered. No grounds have been established to justify refunding the Penalty Charges that have been paid by drivers who have contravened the Public Realm (PR2) bus gate/lane restriction. Significant operational costs have been incurred in operating PR2, which are met from the revenue generated and further costs would be incurred in making refunds. These costs would need to be funded from TWBC budgets, impacting adversely on other council services.
- 5.5 Members of the Board to consider the petition and make a recommendation on how to proceed:
 - Option a) Do nothing (no alterations to the layout in response to the petition).
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 - Option b) Retain the Public Realm 2 scheme with amendments to improve awareness of the restrictions. See Table 2 and Appendix A (drawings)Should option b) be recommended, Members must confirm that the funding source identified in paragraph 4.3 is confirmed as suitable for this purpose.

Contact Officer:

Jamie Watson

KCC Senior Programme Manager (Active Travel).

John Strachan

TWBC Parking Manager

Background documents and appendices

Appendix A: Scheme Drawings

1. Drawing 1.1 & 6.1 – Monson Road j/w Mount Pleasant Road
2. Drawing 2 – Mount Pleasant Road j/w Church Road and Crescent Road
3. Drawing 4 – Calverley Road