

Godalming Together Community Interest Company

Part 1. Suggestions to upgrade the High Street, Godalming

Part 2. Suggestions to make it easier to cross Borough Road, Godalming

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Key	Page
Introduction	2
Part1. Suggestions to upgrade the High Street, Godalming	
Current situation	2.
Suggestions for consideration	3
Experience of shared spaces in Europe	5
Implementation of these ideas in Godalming	
Traffic control	7
Reduction of street clutter	7
Management of the street	8
PART2	
Suggestions to make it easier for people to cross Borough Road, south of the bridge, at the Phillips Memorial Ground.	
Current situation	9
Suggested action	10

Introduction

We have been asked by the Godalming Together Community Interest Company to report on the feasibility of up grading the High Street so that it contributes more effectively to the improved viability and vitality of the town centre.

In addition we have been asked to give an opinion on the options available to make it easier for people to cross Borough Road just south of the bridge over the river, at the Phillips Memorial Ground, Godalming.

PART 1

Suggestions to upgrade the High Street, Godalming

Current situation

The current traffic arrangement appears to work well in terms of function for vehicular traffic and safety. There is a limited amount of on street parking for deliveries and the disabled badge holders. Therefore most shoppers park in one of the off-street car parks and walk to the High Street.

Criticisms concentrate on the speed at which service and deliver vehicles travel, though this is well within the legal limit, as it gives the impression of danger to pedestrians, especially children and the elderly.

There are places where the amount of street furniture seems excessive, resulting in a rather cluttered feel to the street.

Even when the street is closed to general traffic, people tend to keep within the line of the pavements.



There are places in the High Street where the amount of street furniture now seems excessive



Though intended as a street for people, pedestrians effectively are kept to the widths of the original pavements

Suggestions for consideration

In informal pre-project discussions, we were asked to look at the feasibility of creating some form of shared space, where drivers and pedestrians co-exist in mutual harmony.

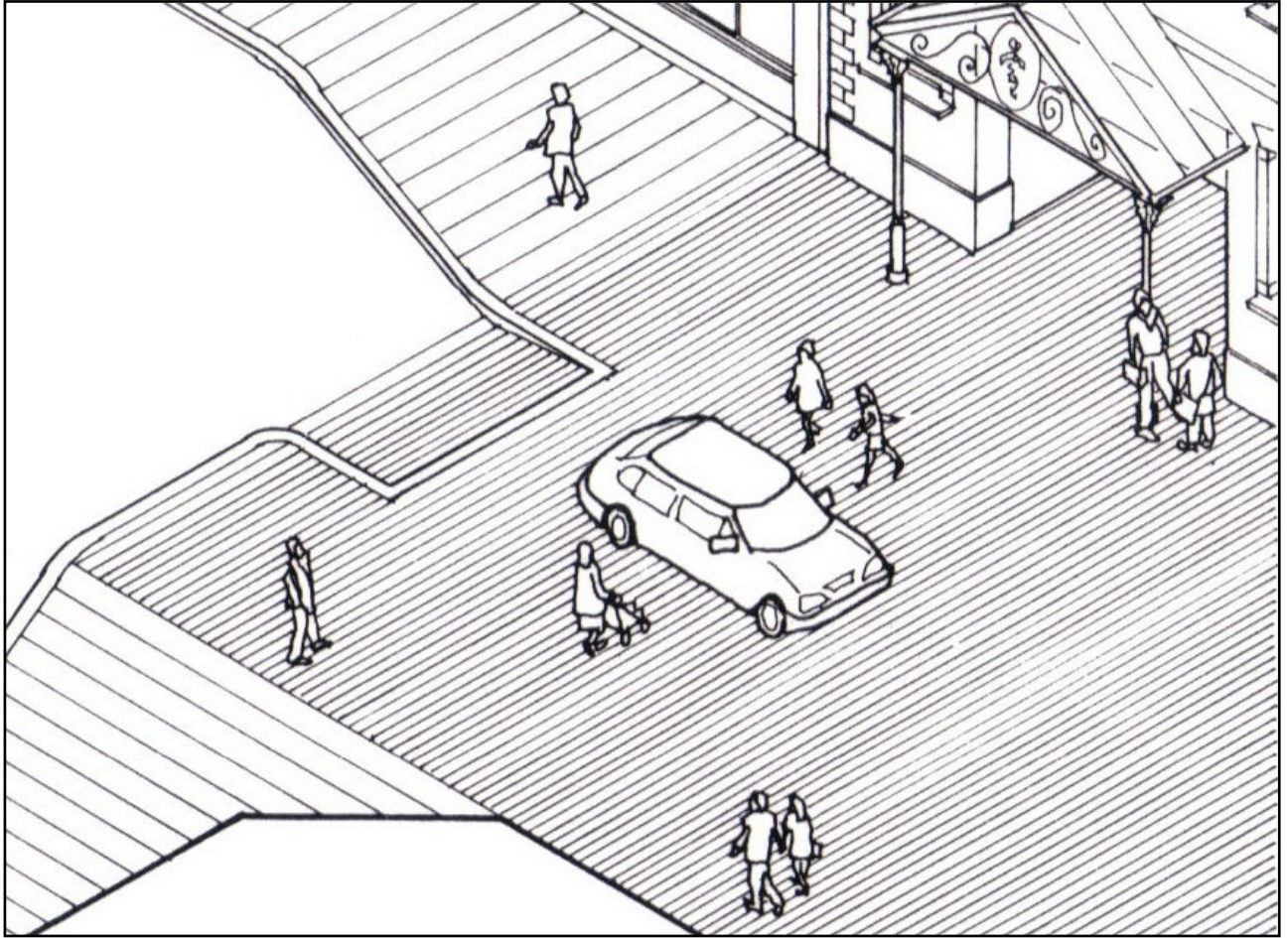
For this to happen it should be obvious to drivers that they are in a pedestrian priority area and that they should drive very slowly and with consideration for pedestrians.

In these circumstances the speed of vehicles is reduced by changing the feel and appearance of the road to suggest to drivers that they should to give priority to pedestrians.



Streets can be designed to permit buses and essential service vehicles and even large flows of traffic in such a way that people feel safe to walk freely in the same space





In these shared spaces the street is designed to change the relationship between vehicles and pedestrians so that pedestrians feel able to use the whole area of the street.

Drivers feel that they are entering a place primarily for pedestrians

A number of shared spaces have been successfully installed in the UK. They vary from main city centres to parts of urban areas and small towns.

In several cases accidents have been reduced. In each example the principles are the same. A degree of uncertainty is introduced especially for drivers, which requires them to concentrate far more than they would normally be obliged to do. They are unable to assume that the way ahead is safe and as a result reduce speed and take far greater care.

In the last five to ten years the number of shared space projects has increased. Each project is different so that the need for drivers to concentrate remains valid.

The common thread that is emerging is that speed and accidents are reduced.

Experience of shared spaces in Europe



Many streets in European towns are regulated so that the drivers of essential service vehicles only have a right to be there if they travel at walking speed and give way to pedestrians



In certain streets all drivers understand that they must travel at walking speed and give way to pedestrians



These European traffic regulation systems are similar to the UK Home Zone traffic regulations. They legally enforce the relationship between pedestrian and vehicles. The 20 km/hr limit is equivalent to approximately 12 mph.

Thus essential vehicles can be acceptably included in the street and the environment for shoppers and therefore trade for retailers is greatly improved.

Implementation of these ideas in Godalming

Traffic control

In the UK, the Home Zone traffic regulations as the name implies are intended to improve the quality of life in residential areas not commercial areas.

However there is at least one such Zone in a mixed residential and commercial area. There has at present been no legal challenge to its use. Therefore the conclusion is that it would be for the highway authority to decide if the regulations were appropriate in any specific street.

It may be that Surrey County Council will take the view that Godalming High Street is appropriate.



The UK Home Zone regulations sign

An alternative is to do what is normal in the UK and create a street that has the appearance of a place where pedestrians have priority, as illustrated and described on page 4.

Buses and service vehicles would be permitted on those terms.

The issue of providing space for vehicles for disabled people also needs to be addressed.

In Godalming High Street, the number of parked cars, together with and the likelihood of vehicles in the centre of the road, results in people on foot being overwhelmed by moving or stationary vehicles to the extent that they are restricted to the areas of the original pavements.

Other acceptable places for vehicles for disabled people to park are needed, near to, but not in the High Street.

Reduction of street clutter

The present street furniture, though seemingly to help protect pedestrians from vehicles, actually gives drivers a clear indication of what part of the street will be pedestrian free: the centre of the road and the kerbside parking places. Here drivers assume they have priority over pedestrians.

An initial step would be to reduce street clutter to the absolute minimum.

Closer studies are likely to suggest that little if any free-standing street furniture is really needed, see page 4.

Management of the street

The quality of the street is an important part of the retail offer. Shoppers have a wide variety of alternative places to take their custom. For essential daily requirements supermarkets provide a pleasant convenient one stop. For more durable or comparison shopping, customers can go to purposely designed covered, warm shopping centres in nearby towns or alternatively shop on line.

Godalming High Street has the potential to return to the feel of a welcoming traditional High Street with easy access for people on foot to all the shops and services in a well looked after location. It could be place that is a greater pleasure to visit, with the highest possible standards of cleanliness and maintenance.

For this to happen in a contemporary context a more fine tuned management of the space may be helpful in the form of a human presence, possible a welcoming Ambassador, with a remit to:

- help customers find the shops and services they are looking for;
- assist drivers and pedestrians;
- keep an eye on how the area is used and
- report immediately on maintenance issues.



People employed to keep parts of big cities clean and tidy are also trained to give helpful local directions. Could this system possibly be adopted by the Godalming TCIC?

PART2

Suggestions to make it easier for people to cross Borough Road, south of the bridge, at the Phillips Memorial Ground.

Current situation

The main problem appears to be that traffic approaching from the north, over the bridge, travels too quickly to be able to stop in time for people to feel sufficiently safe to cross the road from the Memorial Ground to the path leading to the railway station.



Suggested action

An obvious solution might be to install a controlled crossing, such as a zebra or pelican crossing. These have disadvantages in that they create a suburban appearance in a place rather than a small rural town feel, for which Godalming is justly proud.

Where such crossings have been installed, they have not always been totally safe as the infrequency of pedestrians leads to them being ignored by drivers.

An alternative that could be considered is to narrow the road at the place where people cross, so that that they can cross safely when there is a gap in the traffic. This could be done by forming new grass verge(s) at the point indicated by arrows and extending it up to the bridge.



In addition there are opportunities to remove street clutter in order to enhance the rural quality of the area:

- 1. No parking and no cycling signs could be neatly fixed to existing walls, and their existing posts removed;
- 2. The Memorial Ground information board could be fixed neatly to the adjacent wall;
- 3. Redundant notice boards could be removed and the Vicarage Walk sign repainted.

