

# **Spaces For People: Emergency Measures**

## **GPCC Response**

### **Introduction**

This is a response to the public consultation survey which closes on 5 April. It carries *general* observations on the emergency measures programme and offers a number of recommendations as that programme is reviewed by the Council.

### **Actions To Date**

The Council is to be commended on acting quickly and purposefully to introduce the emergency traffic measures. The measures have necessarily been introduced in haste, on a Council-acknowledged 'try and adapt' strategy. Now is the time to 'reflect and adapt' and to reassess carefully the programme before locking it down. Many of the changes made are contentious. As conclusions are drawn from the consultation exercise and specific 'temporary changes' are made permanent, their rationale must be made clear at every level in order to give evidence of proper and fair consultation.

Some of the emergency arrangements are disruptive and intrusive. The changes to pavement, road and parking layouts bring new dynamics to pedestrian and road user interaction, with potentially hazardous consequences as everyone negotiates the new landscape.

The focus on new road use and traffic patterns threatens to overshadow the core consideration. Pedestrians, especially those with an impairment in mobility, must be made to feel secure in the road and pathway environment. Pavements themselves must be made safer to walk on, with defects properly tended to. Road crossings may need to be upgraded or reworked given the more congested nature of many routes and intersections. Pedestrians must be protected from the heightened risks of inconsiderate behaviour on the part of a now wider array of road and pathway users.

### **Recommendations**

'Extra pedestrian space' carved into roadways in many cases looks redundant 'post vaccine'. There will be scope to strip it back and put a focus on fixing the pavement surfaces themselves.

That will permit some cycle space to be realigned. Put a focus on fixing kerbside potholes which present a threat to cyclists and by extension to any drivers who are near them. The cycle ways also will require regular maintenance removing snow, leaves and litter when necessary.

Release some car access and parking space back to the 'town' centres along arterial routes, to support as a priority the re-birth of local businesses. Access is also required for blue badge drivers and for deliveries to businesses.

Weigh-up carefully the 'cost-benefit' and balance of space use between cyclists and drivers along arterial routes. Speed restrictions are understandable. The economic and environmental costs of undue congestion are much less justifiable. A heavier volume of 'white van' delivery traffic is a new element in the road use 'equation'. Any congestion is likely to see traffic and commercial vehicles seeking to use side streets and residential areas as "rat runs".

Demarcate road access and road use to cyclists by all means but road closure to vehicles should not be the default option. Access or closure by monitored 'time band' is an alternative. Road closure does not necessarily reduce the level of traffic but simply increases congestion on other routes.

Work on improving traffic management around heavy-use intersections and roundabouts, first and foremost through better road markings and more signalling. The cycle ways also require improved signage and the lane separators would benefit from more vibrant colouring and better illumination.

Drive home the need for road safety and road-use manners in a new environment where more road users are displaying 'purposeful' attitude in the competition for access and space. When you add in the myriad changes in road use, markings, signage and access, the outcome is a (much) more hostile and dangerous environment. In this context, the concept of "floating bus stops" is potentially hazardous. The same could be said of 'floating parking facilities'.

Given the substantial number of emergency measures being considered as permanent fixtures, it would be beneficial to have a specific communication channel whereby Community Councils and all other interested parties can notify any concerns or problems and put forward specific and local suggestions for improvements. It may well be that once we return to pre-Covid traffic levels many of the current measures may not operate as intended.

## Conclusion

Again, the Council is to be commended for the emergency actions taken. But it is acknowledged from within the Planning Division that the strategy is 'try and adapt'. Change is uncomfortable, but change which is 'imposed' and left to harden without rough edges being smoothed and overall presentational quality being raised will be resented. So there is work to be done on all fronts.