



The case for a car free School Hill & Lewes High Street

It may seem a while ago since the beginning of lockdown, and empty streets and country roads meant cleaner air and a huge increase in cycle use in Lewes & across the country.



However, we are now back to previous levels of motorised vehicle use, which will only get worse in the coming weeks as people go back to work but are encouraged to avoid public transport.

Central Government has created new funds to help increase cycling and walking opportunities, but East Sussex County Council has failed to produce any meaningful new initiatives in Lewes Town & Lewes District.

Proposals for increasing the width of pavements on School Hill and the High Street have also been met with opposition by some traders.

Anyone who shops in Lewes will see the stark difference between the extremely busy pedestrian area in the car free precinct & Cliffe High Street, and the near empty School Hill & the High Street, where narrow pavements and lots of cars deter shoppers.

The two photos below were recently taken on a weekday lunchtime. The car free precinct was buzzing, whilst School Hill was almost empty.



Research both in the UK and across the globe has shown that by reducing traffic a town or city increases the number of shoppers (see links attached).

<http://buildabetterburb.org/six-reasons-resurgence-car-free-shopping-streets/>

<https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/car-free-cities-pedestrianisation-cycling-driverless-vehicles-york-oslo-birmingham-a9299856.html>

<https://www.machynlleth-today.co.uk/article.cfm?id=133412&headline=Car-free%20zones%20in%20four%20town%20centres%20from%20Monday§ionIs=news&searchyear=2020>

With central government policy & funding now promoting cycling & walking in the UK, it is imperative that towns such as Lewes get their fair share of improvements.

However, In spite of evidence that car free zones increases footfall in shopping centres, some Lewes Traders are petitioning ESCC to stop any restrictions to car use in the town. This is unfortunate, as there needs to be some creative thinking done on the future of Lewes as a shopping centre.

For many years shops have been slowly disappearing (especially at the top end of Lewes High Street) and whilst the loss of a few parking spaces & the widening of pavements may help bring back some shoppers to the top end of town, a more radical rethink of a car free centre to Lewes needs to take place if Lewes is going to survive as a commercial centre.

Current government funding in response to Covid-19 offers a once in a generation opportunity to transform our traffic-dominated High Street into a vibrant place where the needs of pedestrians and cyclists are prioritised over traffic and parking. The government is asking for “ambitious proposals”: if our County Council fails to respond, the money will be lost forever.

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