

Our Project to Make Lewes a Low Traffic Town

Who we are

Lewes Living Streets and Cycle Lewes are long established community groups with a shared interest in creating a safer, healthier and more vibrant, low traffic town, where the needs of pedestrians and cyclists are prioritised above the convenience of motor vehicles.

Lewes Living Streets, part of the national Living Streets movement, has campaigned for many years for a 20mph speed limit across the whole town and works with the police on Speedwatch. Other campaigns include pavement parking, pedestrian crossings, safer routes to school and joined up pedestrian routes across the town.

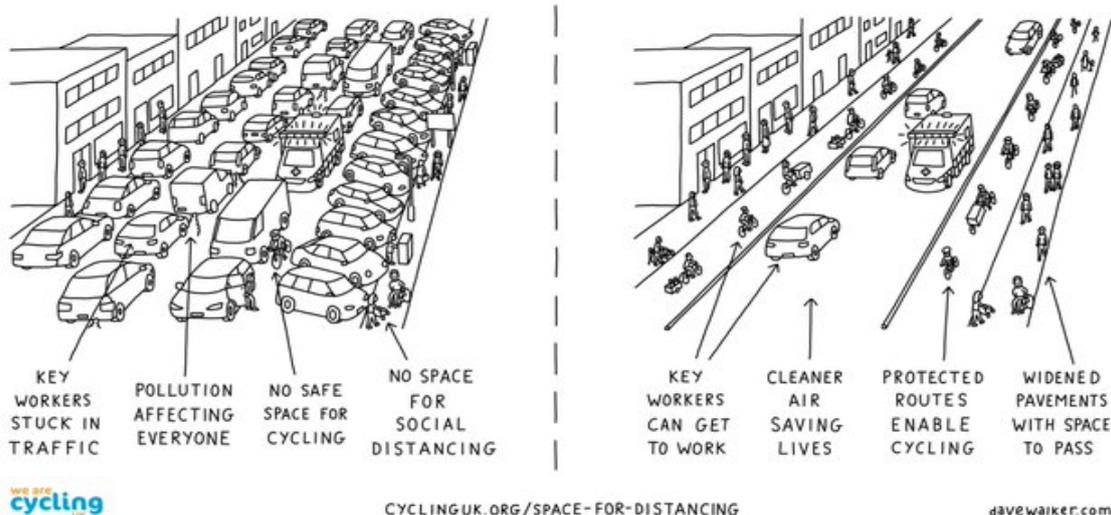
Cycle Lewes campaigns on behalf of all cyclists for safer roads that will encourage more people of all ages to get on bikes. Cycle Lewes are working towards the creation of a network of cycle routes that will make the bicycle the natural choice for all journeys within the town and from the surrounding areas and villages.

In 2018 our two groups jointly commissioned the respected street design consultancy **Urban Movement** to look at some of the key junctions in Lewes. Their report – widely praised by the public and elected members from all three councils – showed how simple changes could reduce vehicle speeds while making life easier and safer for pedestrians, all without reducing traffic flows.

See: <https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/media/4442/lewes-report-jdv1.pdf>

DECISION TIME

BACK TO NORMAL, OR FAST TRACK TO THE FUTURE?



1. Our Objectives

Cycle Lewes and Lewes Living Streets are seeking funding and partners for a project to create low traffic solutions for Lewes High Street. The **objectives** for this project are as follows:

1. Quantify motor traffic in the High Street (Western Road to School Hill), and proportion of through traffic, in order to...
2. Set out and design options for reducing through motor traffic, whilst retaining motor traffic access for deliveries and on-street parking.
3. Carry out a survey of shoppers and visitors accessing the High Street to establish modes of transport, how often they visit, how much do they spend, if by car where do they park, and whether they prefer to shop in the Precinct and Cliffe or School Hill/The High Street and why.
4. Develop options and designs for slowing the traffic on the High Street to the speed limit 20mph or less, whilst creating more space on the High Street for people to enjoy it/socialise/encourage al fresco café-type culture as well as to shop
5. Provide a scheme for a cycle route along the High Street/School Hill (as part of Cycle Route 90), including two way on School Hill, in order to bring cyclists into the High Street
6. Provide a scheme for a pedestrian and cycle link between the Precinct and School Hill/High Street
7. Identify possible rat running alternatives to the High Street, and set out how they might be made less attractive to motorists.

- Investigate a possible northern route for traffic to by-pass the High Street via two way Little East Street, West Street and Offham Road.

2. Our town - Lewes

Lewes is a compact town with a population of under 20,000; even the most distant house is not much more than a mile from the centre. Almost all people live within a 30 minute walk of everything they need: schools, workplaces, shops, pubs and restaurants, leisure facilities, transport hubs.

The largest town in the South Downs National Park, Lewes is an important commercial and tourist centre, a natural hub from which to explore the South Downs and surrounding countryside. Best of all, it's a great place to live, with a strong sense of community.

Lacking large civic spaces, most social activity takes place on its medieval streets, most spectacularly on November 5th when 40,000 people fill the traffic-free streets.

3. Our History of Traffic

For the last 70 years, the places where we live have been planned around the needs of the motorcar. The results of this have had a damaging effect on our bodies, our minds and on the air that we breathe.

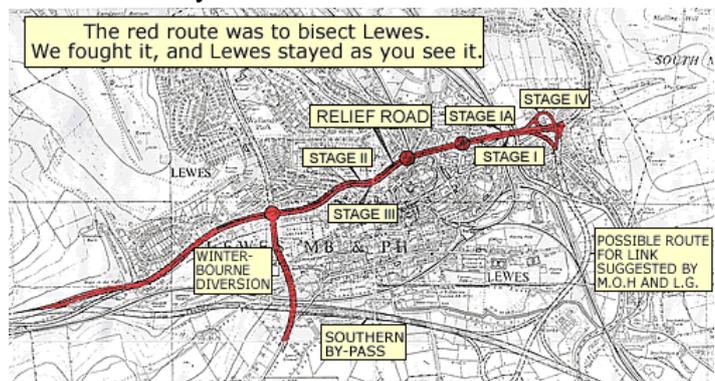
But there has been change. The Friars Precinct and Cliffe High Street have been redesigned to minimize the impact of motor traffic. The Precinct was pedestrianized in 1990. Following this a “Living Cliffe” scheme was proposed in 2002 and completed in 2008. This made Cliffe High Street one way for motor vehicles for access only for delivery and pick ups. (Cyclists have full two-way access). Although initially controversial, today both areas, which are joined by the historic Cliffe Bridge, are lively thriving shopping and outdoor café areas and have demonstrated the benefits of restricting vehicle access and encouraging pedestrians and cyclists.



1 The Precinct today

We want to focus now on improving Lewes High Street from School Hill in the east, (across the road from the pedestrianized precinct) to Western Road in the west.

This street was once the A27 with motor traffic choking the town. The County Council solution was a new motorway style “inner relief



2 From Friends of Lewes – the proposed relief road

road” to be built through the medieval town and in 1963 they secured the backing of the Ministry of Transport. A long campaign of opposition by the town followed, led by Friends of Lewes. In 1969 the District Council funded consultants to look at options and they recommended an alternative southern by-pass which quickly gained widespread support, effectively killing off the inner relief road. But parts of the inner relief road were already built, including the new Phoenix Causeway bridge (completed in 1969) and a much widened Little East Street.

The town secured the southern by-pass (now the A27) which opened in 1976 and the Cuilfail tunnel (opened in 1980) which eliminated most of the through traffic on Lewes High Street.



3 High Street at School Hill today

But by the end of the 20th century the motor traffic was back. Attempts to manage traffic through 20mph speed limits for most of the town have only been partially successful. Motor traffic, narrow pavement (and a hill) have made the High Street less attractive to pedestrians and cyclists whether they are residents, visitors, shoppers or tourists. And some of the shops here are struggling.

As has been demonstrated elsewhere, by giving priority to walking and cycling we can start to look at our streets in a different way. But we recognize that

vehicles will still need access to the High Street.

We believe that measures such as wider pavements, places to meet and to sit, cycle parking, cycle lanes and planting will increase footfall and re-establish the High Street as a social centre within the town. We think this can be achieved whilst maintaining vehicle deliveries and pick ups and access for disabled people.

4. Our Lewes Neighbourhood Plan

The Lewes Neighbourhood plan <https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Lewes-Neighbourhood-Plan-Made-Plan.pdf> adopted in 2019 sets out a framework to guide future developments in our town and these proposals are in keeping with that Plan.

The Neighbourhood Plan highlights the need to encourage more residents and visitors to move around the town on foot or by bike and calls for improvements in public transport.

We want to make these aspirations a reality, developing designs for a revamped High Street. This will be based upon the local knowledge of businesses, community groups and residents working together. We will bring in specialist consultants when needed to ensure that the proposals are achievable and comply with current government policy, guidelines and legislation.

5. Our Councils - why can't they do this?

Lewes is administered by three councils plus the South Downs National Park, who are the planning authority.

East Sussex County Council is the Highway Authority for Lewes. But Lewes is not a priority for them as Lewes town is not an economic growth area. They have also shown a reluctance to change the road layouts of the 1960s for fear of disrupting the motor traffic flows. Discussions with them to agree an east-west cycle route through the town as part of Regional Cycle Route 90 have dragged on for almost a decade.



East Sussex County Council will not provide funding for this project. However, they have said they will co-operate fully. And we will expect that they will incorporate the solutions we devise into their Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan.

Lewes Town Council is keen to support residents, bring visitors to the town and help the traders in order to maintain the viability of the town. They lack the authority to bring about change but are supportive of the project and have allocated £5,400 for two surveys which form a key part of this project.

Lewes District Council covers Seaford and Newhaven and the rural land between as well as Lewes. They have responsibility for environmental health including air quality, off-street car/cycle parks, promoting tourism and community safety. Their air testing (as part of their Air Quality Management Plan) shows that parts of the High Street/School Hill and Fisher Street (just off the High Street), have higher than acceptable levels of pollution from motor traffic. They have recently set up a Cycling and Walking Forum for the District to and are committed to supporting cycling and walking initiatives where they can.

Leading District councilors have welcomed this initiative. Their Climate Change and Sustainability Lead Member has indicated they would support our work to enhance the vitality of our High Street. We believe the outcomes of our work can contribute to East Sussex Reset and its six missions which aim to build future resilience for the towns, including Lewes.

<https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/media/16223/east-sussex-reset-recovery-as-opportunity.pdf>

Both Lewes Town and District Councils have declared a Climate Emergency.

6. Our New Developments

There are a number of new large scale building developments around the town.

The 'North Street Quarter' with up to 400 homes alongside services and workspaces will be very close to the High Street. The ownership of this site is changing hands and it is likely that the development will be re-designed providing an opportunity to re-design the adjacent road system.

The North Street road system was the subject of an earlier re-design by the previous developer and East Sussex County Council which assumed increased levels of vehicle movements across the town and left most of the existing road system intact. This redesign will have an impact on the High Street and particularly the link between the Precinct and School Hill which is included in the scope of this project and so could be a means to finance the physical changes.

There are also new housing/workshop developments underway: 41 apartments and 13 “creative space” workshop units adjacent to Tesco/Brooks Road and 101 new units at Blakes Walk/Southdown Road.

226 more housing units are planned at Old Malling Farm on the north western outskirts of the town. And the Lewes Neighbourhood Plan includes provision for 182 more beyond those above.

These have the potential to generate large amounts of additional motor traffic. To maintain the viability of the town centre, we will want to encourage people living and working here to visit and use the town centre. But we will want them to do so in a way that maintains a low traffic town centre.

7. Our Opportunities

The Covid-19 pandemic, although hugely disruptive for people, the economy and many businesses, has provided opportunities for fresh thinking and to re-design how we move around. Unfortunately, Lewes has missed out on possible funding because it has no agreed solutions.

The pandemic has also put a spotlight on the liveability of our local neighbourhoods, with people spending more time locally, often working from home, using public spaces - especially streets – to socialise and connect with neighbours.

This was an opportunity to better design our High Street to make it more successful, healthy and enjoyable place to live, work and visit.

This was an opportunity to bring about a shift in travel behaviours, reversing the damage inflicted by traffic over recent decades by prioritising the needs of pedestrians and cyclists and providing multiple benefits for the whole town.

Public surveys, including the most recent one carried out for the Department for Transport in December 2019 show that nearly eight out of ten people support measures to reduce road traffic in their neighbourhood and two-thirds of people support re-allocation of road space for cycling and walking.

The government recognised this in its many policy pronouncements including the following:

“COVID-19 restrictions have profoundly impacted the way people live, work and travel as evidenced by the public’s desire to be more active, and the rise in

popularity of cycling and walking. Now, we can embed those changes in people's travel behaviour, increase active travel, and transform permanently how many people move around, particularly in towns and cities."

DfT 'Gear Change: a bold vision for the future for cycling and walking.

Government funds were available from the Emergency Active Travel Funds. But very little was proposed for Lewes except a proposal to widen pavements on Lewes High Street to aid social distancing. This came to nothing due to opposition to the way this was to be done (most particularly the removal of many on-street parking spaces and the creation of a plastic block wall).



4 Waltham Forest

But many other communities (*such as Waltham Forest in picture*) have shown how carefully considered modifications to our streets, designed in co-operation with the people who use them, can create attractive, thriving and economically successful environments.

The Government continues to be committed to supporting active travel – cycling and walking – beyond the Covid crisis. A second tranche of government money - now called the Active Travel Fund - was made available to local Highway authorities in Autumn 2020. East Sussex got an allocation of £3.2 million but had to hand back unspent money from the Emergency Active Travel fund, so secured only £2.71 million new money. Again Lewes and the High Street lost out: only a trial School Street (at Southover School) was given funding.

The lesson is clear - we must have prepared "shovel ready" solutions: credible detailed proposals that have community support and buy-in, are designed to DfT standards and are ready for implementation by East Sussex County Council once funding becomes available.

8. Our Method of Approach

The first step in designing traffic solutions in the High Street is to understand current travel habits and possible changes. A **shopping survey** is planned. This will cover how people get to the High Street (car, bus, walk, train etc), how frequently they come and how much they spend etc. And if they come by car, where do they park.

This survey will be carried out 'face to face' with people on the High Street by an independent company. There will also be a survey of High Street retailers and businesses covering the same questions

Alongside this we plan a **traffic survey**. This is needed to understand motor traffic movements through Lewes High Street. Where is it coming in and going out? How much is 'through traffic' (not stopping) and could be diverted from the town? This will help us understand what alternative routes drivers might take if the passage of traffic through the High Street is slowed. This traffic survey would be carried out using cameras at appropriate points and would be facilitated by East Sussex County Highways.

This survey work is the first stage. The project will use this data to enable solutions to be devised and designed to meet the other objectives set out above (on pages 2/3). This work will be carried out by Urban Movement or a similar design consultancy such as Phil Jones Associates. These solutions/designs would be the subject of extensive engagement with people and organisations across the town (as set out below)



5 How Lewes High Street could look

9. Our People – a Community Resources

We plan to use people with expertise within the town who are willing to give their time and help pro bono. This may be facilitating meetings, organizing public events, designing information and publicity, creating drawings and videos and designing questionnaires. We will also use community resources like Lewes News which goes to every household in the town alongside social media platforms. We will do so to communicate and engage with people and organisations across the town to explain the options and agree upon the best solution for the High Street. As we have said above, widespread and genuine community engagement is the key to the success of this project.

We will also utilize people in and around the town with technical expertise in planning, highway design and with knowledge of good practice elsewhere.

We will employ specialist consultants with skills in transport planning and design/engineering.

These people will work together collaboratively over a 20 month period to come up with the best possible ideas, drawing on insight and work from a range of successful projects across the UK and developing a flexible implementation plan.

10. Our Budget

We estimate the total cost of this project is £22,400 (including VAT) plus a community, Cycle Lewes and Lewes Living Streets contribution equivalent to £2,300 for facilitation/advocacy and administration.

The £22,400 includes £5,400 for the two surveys plus £15,600 (£13,000 plus VAT) for transport experts who will design and present the proposed solutions and revise them as necessary as we move through the consultation phase. We have also included an estimate of £1,400 for design and printing of consultation materials.

Lewes Town Council have agreed to pay £5,400 for the two surveys. We are seeking funding for the remaining £17,000 of costs.

11. Our Project Management

We will set up a project advisory board consisting of ourselves together with representatives from the Independent High Street Traders Association, Chamber of Commerce, Transition Town Lewes, Friends of Lewes, access groups and residents' groups and with representatives from Lewes Town and District councils and the two Lewes County Councillors.

12. Our Desired Outcomes

The project will deliver “**shovel ready**” traffic/transport solutions for Lewes High Street, based on a vision for the town that has support across the community (e.g. residents, traders, cyclists, pedestrians, businesses, environmental and conservation groups, access groups, and Lewes Town Council).



These solutions will be based on sustainable goals (a move from motor vehicles to cycling and walking). They will prioritise health, wellness and quality of life and the reduction of carbon and noxious emissions.

13. Our Future Work

The project will identify other changes/works that are needed. These could be changes to other roads around the town, changes to bus services into the town, e-bike hire scheme for the town, e-bike storage, hubs for deliveries, an expanded car club scheme, and space for parking outside the town centre. Ideas around these themes will be developed but we have not costed for design work on these and so they will need to be developed and form separate projects.

14. Our Governance/Management

Cycle Lewes and Lewes Living Streets will be responsible for overall management of the work; it will form part of their ongoing joint work (started 18 months ago). Cycle Lewes will take full responsibility for the reporting to donors and financial management.

15. Our Initial Project Plan

It is difficult to set out an accurate timetabled plan for this work as the two surveys, which are pre-requisites for the design work, cannot start until a return to a normal pattern of behavior post Covid. Effective consultation will also be impossible during Covid. On the basis that we can start on the surveys around May 2021, the following timetable will apply:

Month	Activity to be completed
June 2021	Complete shoppers/visitors survey and survey of through traffic Identify further survey work needed
August 2021	Complete additional survey work
October 2021	Complete preliminary design work
December 2021	Complete first round of communication and engagement
February 2022	Complete redesigns where necessary
April 2022	Complete second round of communication and engagement
September 2022	Agreement with East Sussex County Council on design solution Agreement on area where further work is needed.