

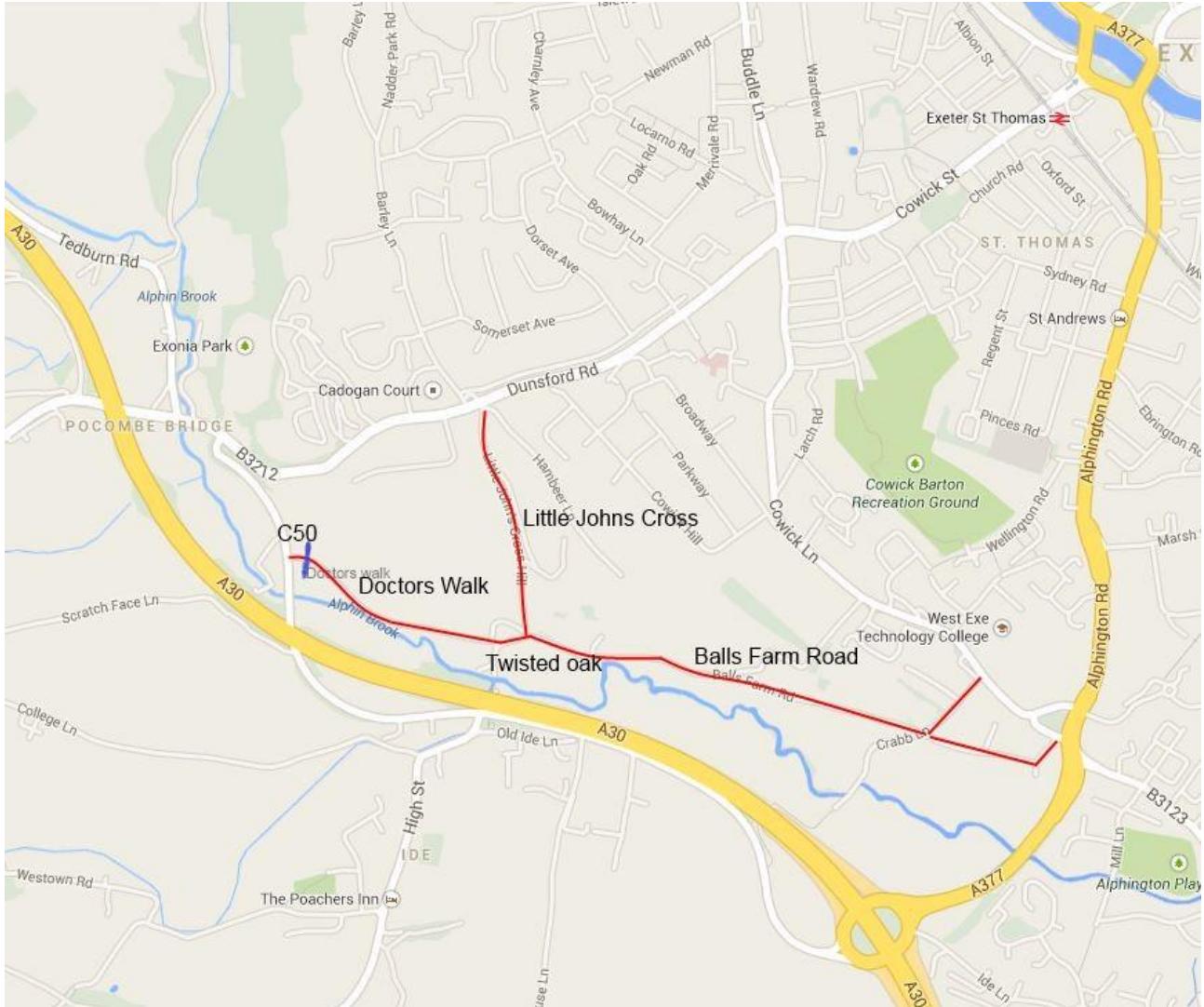
Report to Ide Parish Council meeting 17 March 2021
Presented by Cllr Andy Swain

Paper 14

Balls Farm Road, Doctors Walk and Little John's Cross Hill. Impact of temporary closure.

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For many years there has been a large amount of traffic using Balls Farm Road, Little John's Cross Hill, and Doctors Walk illegally as a rat run, causing problems on Balls Farm Road which is very narrow with poor visibility, and Little John's Cross Hill where there are steep banks, no footpaths and high traffic speeds.



In 2013 this was already a problem which had involved Police and Council action, including the introduction of the timed restriction on Doctors Walk. For the avoidance of doubt, before 2013 it was already illegal to use Doctors Walk to drive between Ide and routes into the western side of the city in either direction. It was a common misconception that it was OK to drive into Doctors Walk after 10:30 am. The second sign midway along Doctors Walk was routinely ignored, but had always made this illegal except for access.

Local councillors have had many reports of people who walk and cycle experiencing difficulty with the continuous stream of illegal vehicles, encountering verbal abuse and threatening behaviour from drivers and being forced off the road into the hedges and bank. This includes children from Ide walking and cycling to West Exe and other schools.

In 2013 members of Ide community started doing traffic surveys. By December 2017 surveys showed 158 vehicles per hour on Little John's Cross Hill and 102 on Balls Farm Road, almost

double the rates (76 and 70) recorded in 2013. Around 2015 there was a serious incident on Balls Farm Road where a dog walker was struck by a vehicle and hospitalised. About the same time a West Exe school child was hit by a car, the driver then told them they were not supposed to be walking there.

In 2018 a team of volunteers from Ide carried out a survey of all residents and businesses on the restricted area, with 94 responses. 98% said they were concerned about the traffic on these roads, and 95% thought action should be taken. 80% had experienced problems on these roads from other road users.

By November 2019 there were a series of well attended community walks along Balls Farm Road to highlight the problem. Coverage on ITV West Country can still be viewed here.

<https://youtu.be/NNZFNj4IjIQ>

Over the years Councillors have worked with Police and Devon Highways looking for ways to improve the situation. Police resources continue to be cut so they could not carry out frequent enforcement. Traffic continued to increase, and Ide residents and others continued to report problems. A permanent solution was needed but there are many considerations to balance, including the needs of businesses and residents, turning space for the bin lorry and safety considerations.

Trial closure

In September 2020, after consultation with local businesses, Devon Highways introduced a temporary closure of Doctors Walk to address these issues. Drivers can use Balls Farm Road and Little John's Cross Hill, to access the Twisted Oak pub and the Ide primary school walking bus. Residents and visitors can still drive to and from the houses. There is new signage directing customers to the Twisted Oak.

Following that closure, volunteers from Ide Parish Council and the community have done further surveys to compare with previous findings.

Traffic Levels

The following tables show summary information of traffic surveys.

In each column we show the normalised vehicle rate per hour.

DW represents vehicle journeys along Doctors Walk

JC represents vehicle journeys along Little Johns Cross Hill

BF represents vehicle journeys along Balls Farm Road

Ped represents pedestrian journeys by any route

Bike represents cycle journeys by any route

Car represents vehicle journeys by any route

The peak time for students walking and cycling to school is 8:00 to 8:30 and the traffic surveys over the years have included that time. Successive years are compared consistently by comparing the rate in the 8:00 to 8:30 frame. Surveys have been done at other times of the day and for longer periods. In each case the time is shown. Rates are all normalised to movements per hour. More recently we surveyed 8:00 – 9:00 am. The hour can then be compared with DCC survey data which uses hour bins.

All rates are movements per hour, showing historical rates and since closure.

Date	Time	DW	JC	BF	Ped	Bike	Car	Notes
21/11/13	8:00 – 8:30	82	76	70	22	12	122	
12/02/14	8:00 – 8:30	103	103	69	24	9	139	
24/03/14	8:00 – 8:30	151	153	91	36	9	209	
03/03/15	8:00 – 8:30	132	124	120	23	10	190	
16/03/15	8:00 – 8:30	112	124	99	17	10	174	After Police action in 2015
15/11/17	8:00 – 8:30	195	158	102	20	13	228	Average over 6 days
26/11/18	8:00 – 8:30	100	75	56	15	11	120	After police action Average over 5 days
01/09/20								
								Trial Closure
15/09/20	8:00 – 8:30	22	34	17	24	25	37	Average over 3 days
30/01/21	13:00-14:00	14	14	12	40	9	20	Saturday Afternoon Most Schools closed
02/03/21	8:00 – 9:00	9	14	7	20	6	15	Rainy Tuesday morning Most Schools closed
03/03/21	8:00 – 9:00	5	9	4	16	8	11	Wednesday Morning Most Schools closed
03/03/21	14:00 – 15:00	13	20	9	69	8	22	Wednesday Afternoon Most Schools closed
05/03/21	15:00 – 16:00	8	10	8	59	13	13	Friday Afternoon

Effect of Covid Pandemic

The Covid pandemic has had a significant effect on traffic flows meaning that care is needed when making comparisons between present day and pre-2020. Devon Highways can probably give a good figure of relative traffic levels in this area before and after the pandemic. To get some idea, we have counted vehicles approaching Alphington Roundabout on Ide Village Road (the old C50) from Ide between 8:00 and 9:00 am on Tuesday 29 Sept. A normal school-day. This can be compared directly with the figure given in the traffic surveys for the Park and Ride proposal in 2016.

C50 traffic approaching Alphington roundabout, 8:00 to 9:00 am	
2016 Park and Ride survey	277
Sept 2020 Survey	237

This shows a small decrease in traffic on 2016 levels confirming that traffic levels on local roads are not much below pre-pandemic levels.

There are increased numbers of people walking in many areas due to Covid Lockdown restrictions and this will be inflating the numbers here to some extent especially in the afternoons, but school and workplace closures are decreasing the number, especially of cyclists. This does show that it is now a route that attracts leisure traffic and we can expect much of that to continue, and more commuter walkers and cyclists to return in the morning slot. We will continue to survey in the coming months as lockdown eases.

Effect on Little John's Cross Hill

Some concerns have been raised that traffic diverting round the block will result in increased traffic on Little John's Cross. On the other hand the closure is preventing traffic which used to rat run Doctors Walk and Little John's Cross Hill often at high speed. The surveys show that overall traffic on Little John's Cross Hill is hugely reduced.

Effect on Balls Farm Road

Some concerns have been raised that closing Doctors Walk rather than Balls Farm Road would not result in reduced traffic on Balls Farm Road, and might even increase it. The surveys confirms this is not happening. In fact the traffic on Balls Farm Road is slashed to around 1/6 of its former level (when compared on the same weekday morning time period).

Effect on Active Travel (walking, cycling) and horses

The most spectacular outcome of the closure is that active travellers (pedestrians and cyclists) have increased dramatically. Cycle and pedestrian traffic have seen a steady decline until 2018 with the continuing increasing vehicle traffic and incidents of abuse by drivers.

The survey from 15/9 averaged over 3 days showed more than twice as many bikes as ever recorded previously. Pedestrian commuter traffic (weekday mornings) has bounced back despite schools and businesses still being closed. There has also been a phenomenal increase in leisure pedestrians in the afternoons and weekends. This has been seen everywhere but not to this extent.

This increase in active travel is most welcome and supports the idea that Ide was becoming cut off as a commuter village accessible only by car or infrequent bus services. Protecting this road is reintegrating Ide into Exeter's active travel network, and future proofing that network and connections to the south west of Exeter.

Effects on Residents

It was expected that the residents of the roads, losing their ability to access their properties from one side would have been the main opponents to closure. The survey of residents in 2018 showed more in favour than against it being "Closed to through traffic".

Volunteers have been approached a few times while doing traffic surveys by residents of the restricted area to say that they did have concerns, but they are pleased with the peaceful and safe roads they have now. One said "It is a joy to use this route".

A traffic survey volunteer also spoke to a couple recently who live on the Tedburn Road near Pocombe Bridge. They are very pleased with the closure which now gives them a safe route as an alternative to Pocombe Hill which is awful for active travel.

Concerns Raised

Possible impact on businesses is a concern, especially the Twisted Oak. This is certainly a concern and must be taken into account along with the positive effect on the stables on Balls Farm Road which does a lot of work with disabled children.

Pubs like the Turf Locks, Double Locks, and the pub at Fingle Bridge make a unique selling point of their remoteness and inaccessibility. The Twisted Oak now has an attractive quiet rural location easily accessible from St Thomas, Alphington and the whole active travel network by excellent low traffic routes. These routes are being well used by leisure travellers. Customers can still reach it by car too.

Other Options

Over the years Councillors have had many meetings with Police and Highways and many options have been considered.

Enforcement based solutions are not viable in the long term, and tend to cause resentment when penalties are enforced.

The footpath to Alphington could provide a traffic free route from Ide into Exeter, but this is a footpath, not a cycle track. Before and after the improved sections would need considerable and expensive improvement. This route would be a long way round from Balls Farm Road and no alternative at all for Little John's Cross Hill.

In previous years closure has been considered midway along Balls Farm Road, and near the bottom. Ide PC had supported closure of Balls Farm Road at the twisted oak tree. This would have dealt with the high traffic volume, and the aggressive behaviour of drivers on Balls Farm Road, but would have done nothing to protect Little John's Cross Hill where walkers and residents report high speeds and close passes.

Overall effect

Overall the closure of Doctors Walk has been hugely effective at reducing the illegal through vehicle traffic. It has so far solved both the separate problems of Balls Farm Road and Little John's Cross Hill while retaining a reasonable level of access for residents and businesses. It is much more effective than the Police actions have been, and the effects are more likely to be long term. It has reopened active travel routes into Ide that were being made unusable by through traffic, an essential step if Councils at every level are to meet their targets for emissions and air pollution, and move towards Net Carbon Neutral.

Consultation continues and you can contribute your views by emailing transportplanning-mailbox@devon.gov.uk

Cllr Andy Swain 12 March 2021