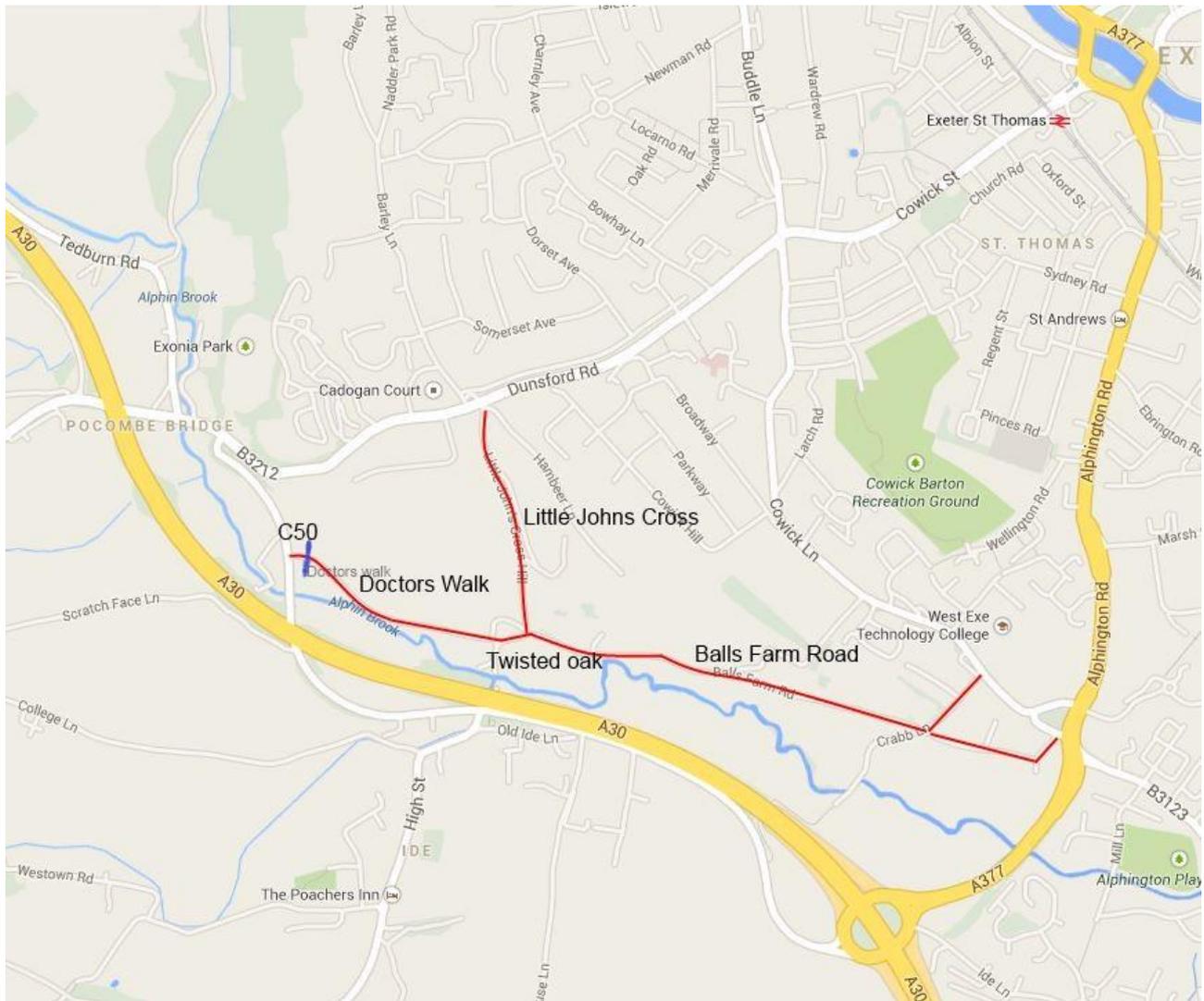


Balls Farm Road, Doctors Walk and Little Johns Cross Hill. Impact of temporary closure.

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 use Doctors Walk as a shortcut to Exeter 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 John's 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 survey 8:00 – 9:00 am. The hour can then be compared with DCC survey data which uses one hour data 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
15/06/21	8:00 – 9:00	37	51	18	38	17	53	Lockdown eased, Schools open
16/06/21	8:00 – 9:00	29	39	16	41	16	42	Lockdown eased, Schools open
17/06/21	8:00 – 9:00	34	63	32	28	2	64	Lockdown eased, Schools open, Rainy

Effect of Covid Pandemic

The Covid pandemic has had a significant effect on traffic flows meaning that care is needed when making comparisons between lock-down periods and pre-2020. A survey of vehicles approaching Alphington Roundabout on the C50 / Ide Village Road from Ide between 8:00 and 9:00 am on Tuesday 29 Sept 2020 showed 237 vehicles/hour compared with the figure given in the traffic surveys for the Park and Ride proposal in 2016 which was 277 vehicles per hour. This shows that traffic levels on local roads are not much below pre-pandemic levels.

During the surveys in June 2020 there were still some Covid restrictions in place, but schools and most workplaces were open, pubs and restaurants were open with restrictions. Queues were forming round Alphington Roundabout similar to those pre Covid. In general traffic is considered close to back to normal.

Effect on Little John's Cross Hill

Some concerns were 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. With the June surveys we now see traffic largely normal, and can now say with some confidence that the closure (and not lockdown) has reduced overall traffic on Little John's cross Hill to between 1/3 and 1/2 of former levels.

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 confirm this is not happening. The June surveys show the return of some rat running traffic, post lockdown, but in such small numbers that the closure can only be viewed as a huge success. Balls Farm Road now sees vehicles per hour in the 30s, compared to over 100 before the closure.

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 had seen a steady decline until 2018 with the continuing increasing vehicle traffic and incidents of abuse by drivers.

The survey from 15/9/20 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.

In early 2021 there were increased numbers of people walking recreationally in many areas due to Covid lockdown restrictions and this would have inflated the numbers at that time to some extent especially in the afternoons.

In June 2021, it was noted during surveys that most of the pedestrian and cycle traffic is related to schools, travel to work, or dog walking (identified by school uniforms, dogs, and some individuals known to the surveyors). These are activities that we expect to continue long term. The Covid recreational walkers have largely subsided; however, numbers of walkers and cyclists have not declined, but continued to increase.

This increase in active travel is most welcome and supports the idea that Ide was becoming cut off as a commuter village accessibly 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 several 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 and Other Options

The 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 Hotel, Double Locks and the Fingle Bridge Inn 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 with only a slight detour. The Twisted Oak was never visible from the C50, and would not have attracted passing trade except through the signage which it still has.

It has been suggested that some Ide residents feel nostalgic about approaching Ide via Little John's Cross Hill, which was the main route to the village before the A30 was built around 1977. Using Little John's Cross Hill to approach Ide has been illegal for a long time.

It has been suggested that traffic is no longer able to avoid the dangerous turning at Pocombe Bridge by using Doctors Walk as an alternative. It is hard to see how the levels and behaviour of traffic seen on these lanes before closure can be considered an acceptable alternative to keeping the main road traffic on the main roads.

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 also near the bottom of Little John's Cross Hill at its junction with Balls Farm Road. 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 in reducing illegal, vehicular through traffic. It has so far solved both the separate problems of Balls Farm Road and Little John's Cross Hill while retaining access for residents and businesses. It is much more effective than the Police actions have been, and the June surveys show strong evidence that the increase in active travel is a long term and sustainable shift in behaviour and not a temporary effect of the Covid measures. 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. The continued existence of some rat running was to be expected, but we would overall describe the problem as solved.

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

This report prepared by Safe Routes for Ide. 20 June, 2021.