

Walk this way!

In a recent survey, the Datchet Neighbourhood Plan team asked what would make walking and cycling in Datchet easier and more pleasant. Alison Crampin reports

Last summer, the Datchet Neighbourhood Plan (DNP) team recorded high levels of pollution in the village centre. While this is undoubtedly affected by vehicles coming through village from elsewhere, local traffic is also contributing to the problem. There are more than 3000 vehicles in Datchet alone, with nearly 75% of working residents commuting by car, and around 1000 children in the village who need to get to school each day.

In the UK, a fifth of all personal trips are less than one mile, and two-thirds are less than five miles. We are told that completing more of these short journeys on foot or by bicycle can benefit our health and wellbeing, helping to increase fitness and reduce excess body fat. (This is particularly important in Datchet where childhood obesity is higher than the Borough average.) Leaving the car at home also helps to improve air quality and reduces our exposure to pollution which has been shown to be higher inside a car than out.

VILLAGE-WIDE SURVEY

The DNP team was keen to find out whether better town planning could make it easier to walk or cycle so we launched a survey on Clean Air Day, 20 June, supported by the Parish Council. The survey was also available online, at The Royal Stag, The Bridge, the library and Datchet Health Centre, and at our stand at the Village Fete.

Nearly 250 people responded. Of those, nearly four-fifths live less than 15 minutes' walk from the village centre. Just over half, 57%, usually walk or cycle to the village centre or Tesco. Twice as many people drive to work/school than walk, cycle or use public transport.

We asked if anything deterred you from walking or cycling, and what could be done to make it easier. You told us that traffic was the primary problem. You would like to see more traffic-calming measures in the centre and on the main routes into and out of the village, making it safer for pedestrians and cyclists. Suggestions included speed bumps, cameras, traffic lights, lower speed limits, a one-way system giving priority to pedestrians/cyclists, a ban on coaches and lorries except for deliveries, and a sign asking drivers to switch off engines while waiting at the level crossings. Some of you would like to deter motorists from cutting through Datchet to and from the M4/M25.

You asked for more pedestrian crossings and safer crossing points with dropped kerbs, especially on school routes. The roads you find particularly difficult to cross include the High Street, Horton, Slough, Windsor and Queens Roads, Mays Island, from North Green to Costa, and from Jubilee Green to the chemist. You told us that drivers often ignore the zebra crossing, especially when the level crossings are closed, and drive on the wrong side of the road.

You find some areas difficult to navigate with a pushchair, wheelchair or mobility scooter; at the roundabout on the High Street, for example, where you can find yourself marooned on the tiny central island with a buggy and small children, or at the gate from Holmlea Walk to the Recreation Ground. Some said you would like to let your children walk to school unaccompanied but were fearful of the busy roads. (It was pointed out that Datchet has three schools but only one zebra crossing.)

You complained about cars parked on pavements and verges, dustbins left out, and overhanging vegetation which all create obstacles for pedestrians. You told us where footpaths are non-existent and listed the roads and footpaths which you think are too narrow to be safe. Someone suggested that higher kerbs might deter vehicles from driving on the pavements.

You would like a better footpath into Windsor, wide enough for an adult to walk beside a child and with a clearly-defined kerb. You told us that the alternative route via the Thames Path can be muddy and overgrown and is difficult with pushchairs. Some said you felt unsafe walking there alone.

Personal safety is an issue, especially where you think there is inadequate street lighting, for example on Eton, Slough and Windsor Roads, The Avenue, Percy Place, the footpath across the Rec from Holmlea Walk to Horton Road, the short cut from Beaulieu Close to Montagu Road, and from Montagu Road over the railway footbridge. (You also asked for more pedestrian shortcuts, such as from Montrose Avenue to the Recreation Ground.) Some people mentioned anti-social behaviour around Tesco and the Recreation Ground.

Many would like Datchet to be more cycle-friendly, with new cycle paths or lanes, better connectivity between existing paths, and places to park bikes securely. You would like to be able to cycle safely to Windsor and Slough and for your children to cycle to school but are deterred by the volume of traffic, aggressive drivers, and because you feel vulnerable at many of the junctions and mini-roundabouts. There were diverging views on whether cyclists should be allowed on pavements, with several people wanting separate lanes for walking and cycling for safety reasons. There were also complaints about cyclists using the pavement when a cycle path exists.

We asked what would make you more likely to use public transport. A number of people use the P1 White Bus to Windsor but, generally, you would like more frequent bus services to Slough, Staines and Windsor, which link up with other services, such as to local hospitals. Some of you would like faster trains to London, with toilets, while others felt that more transport police would make it safer for unaccompanied children to use the trains. Cost was also an issue; you told us it can be cheaper to take a taxi than the train.

SUMMARY

Many thanks to everyone who completed the survey. The DNP team is now working through the responses to see which of the issues you raised can be covered by planning policies in the Neighbourhood Plan or as supplementary projects, and which can be passed on to the Parish or Borough Council for further action.

STOP PRESS Since the launch of this survey, RBWM council has declared a climate emergency and protecting the environment has now become a top priority. If you'd like to make a difference and give your car a day off, World Car Free Day is 22 September 2019.

For more information about Datchet's Neighbourhood Plan, please visit www.datchetneighbourhoodplan.org

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PICS & LOGO:

Caption: The DNP team launched the village-wide survey on Clean Air Day in June



Caption: Traffic takes priority over pedestrians on many of Datchet's roads



Caption: Vehicles produce significant amounts of nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide and other pollution



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