

RESPONSE FROM THE WORKS COMMUNICATION TEAM AT SURREY HIGHWAYS

The closure of this section of road would have had less impact during the lockdown period or during the school holidays. However, waiting to the start of the Academic Year when schools are reopening fully for the first time, and where public transport for pupils is being actively discouraged, seems to be particularly ill advised.

These essential works to rectify a safety issue have been planned for some time. Specialist works such as this are required to follow a formal tender process and this takes time. We were finalising the works in March and then commenced the tender process. Unfortunately, we could not have predicted what was to happen next regarding Covid-19. We also must get a permit for any works undertaken on the roads and trying to get a road space where the diversion and works do not clash with others in the area, along with needing to liaise and coordinate closely with Highways England, given the close proximity to junction 8 of the M25, also dictated the dates we could work.

The Government guidance on School reopening regarding transport states that "Local authorities must give active consideration to the impacts of increased car use on local congestion, and ensure that mitigations to minimise these impacts are implemented through their network management duty".

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transport-to-school-and-other-places-of-education-autumn-term-2020/transport-to-school-and-other-places-of-education-autumn-term-2020>

The impact of the work is not widespread it is localised to the main access to the school there are many alternative routes into the school.

Our network management team were heavily involved in determining the timing of the works, and the diversion routes, and those decisions have to be taken from previous experience and understanding of driver behaviour, whilst looking at the overall road network, not just the stretch of road which is closed.

The government guidance referred to was issued mid- August, after our works had been programmed. Our Traffic Management plan is robust and has been carefully considered. This was a very difficult task to achieve and whilst some alternative routes are not ideal and will mean drivers have to seek alternative routes, it is the 'least worst' option for the network overall. This means that it impacts on some more than others. We have publicised the works early to allow people the time to assess and plan the alternative which mitigates the disruption to them.

I would like to know what mitigations have been considered and how closing a main access to the school fits in with this.

As with all Surrey Highways works we have an official diversion and locals finding their own routes. We would expect this with school traffic. Local buses are diverting down Pebble Hill, and other routes that drivers may choose are down to the individuals. Our communications plan is designed to ensure all those using this route are aware of the works and can pre-plan alternate to routes to their destination, including school traffic.

We are not able to set up marshals or one-way roads for school access as this will be open to abuse and drivers not following our signage. If we were to place traffic lights or a temporary one-way system on Markledge Lane or Rocky Lane this would cause the congestion on the A23 which is right next to a permanent controlled junction. Given the A23 will take much of the displaced A217 traffic

for longer north/south journeys, we are seeking to avoid creating additional disruption on this parallel strategic route.

Has the council considered allowing for access at certain times of the day, for example 7.30am – 9.00am which could be manned to prevent unsuitable vehicles using the route, such as is being used further along the A217 for access to Cannons Lane properties?

On the A217 at Burgh Heath marshalled access is across a traffic light controlled junction. The team have been able to safely set up and maintain access for residents and the school only, and is necessary given that there is no other access to these properties and school. Whereas for your school there are several alternative routes. Whilst these are not necessarily ideal, they are nevertheless access routes to the school. We acknowledge that there is no ideal traffic management solution to facilitate these works, but we believe that the measures decided upon represent the 'least worst option'.

If you could share this on your website as well as our works page – www.a217.today for parents to see then we would be grateful,