

Village Centre and Community Space

1 Summary

Nearly half of all respondents to the Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire in 2017 requested the villages' infrastructure provide more of a focus on community, family, and young people.

This is a broad topic, and one for which no single solution will provide all the answers. But it has prompted the Steering Group to consider how the centre of Lower Shiplake could be improved in order provide a space which works more effectively for the community.

A study was commissioned from a team of highways consultants who specialise in the design of urban centres. Their initial conclusions suggest that the hub of the village can be reconfigured to provide more space for people to stop, meet, shop, and relax, and at the same time enable safer and calmer traffic conditions.

The main conclusions of their report are summarised below.

2 Current situation

The junction of Station Road, Mill Road, and Northfield Avenue forms a natural focal point for Lower Shiplake. It provides local shopping, Post Office, a popular pub/restaurant, is close to the railway station, is on the route of the Thames Path, and is the main artery for traffic in and out of the village. A school bus picks up and drops youngsters from the local schools.

In its current form, though, the area is far from ideal. The broad open space encourages random parking both on the road and on footways; there is no provision for cycles; for seating, a single small bench in the shade of the Baskerville fence is the only place to relax.



As traffic approaches the centre from Station Road, drivers are allowed the impression that they have priority over the space, and despite the 20mph speed limit, traffic is mostly allowed to proceed across the junction without restraint.



For pedestrians, and particularly for the disabled, there are no footpaths along the approaches from Mill Road and Northfield Avenue, and a single narrow footpath from Station Road west. When they reach the centre, pedestrians and cyclists are forced to negotiate parked vehicles both on the carriageway and on footpaths. There is particular congestion during school bus stops.



Junction layout

3 Traffic Study

During March 2018 a traffic study was carried out, and revealed the following:

- Daytime traffic volume is just over 1,000 vehicles per day, 4% of which comprises trucks and lorries
- Average speed of vehicles is 20.5mph
- Around 160 people walk in to the centre each day
- Parking within 50m of the centre peaks at 20 vehicles at mid-day, and falls to 12 during the afternoon

The busiest day for traffic is normally Wednesday, when domestic refuse collection adds to the regular deliveries to the shops and the Baskerville Arms. Turning circles for the largest vehicles, and for the school bus, were plotted, and used to determine the space required for all vehicles to safely manoeuvre. This in turn informed the space available at each corner that could be traffic-free.

4 Outline Recommendations

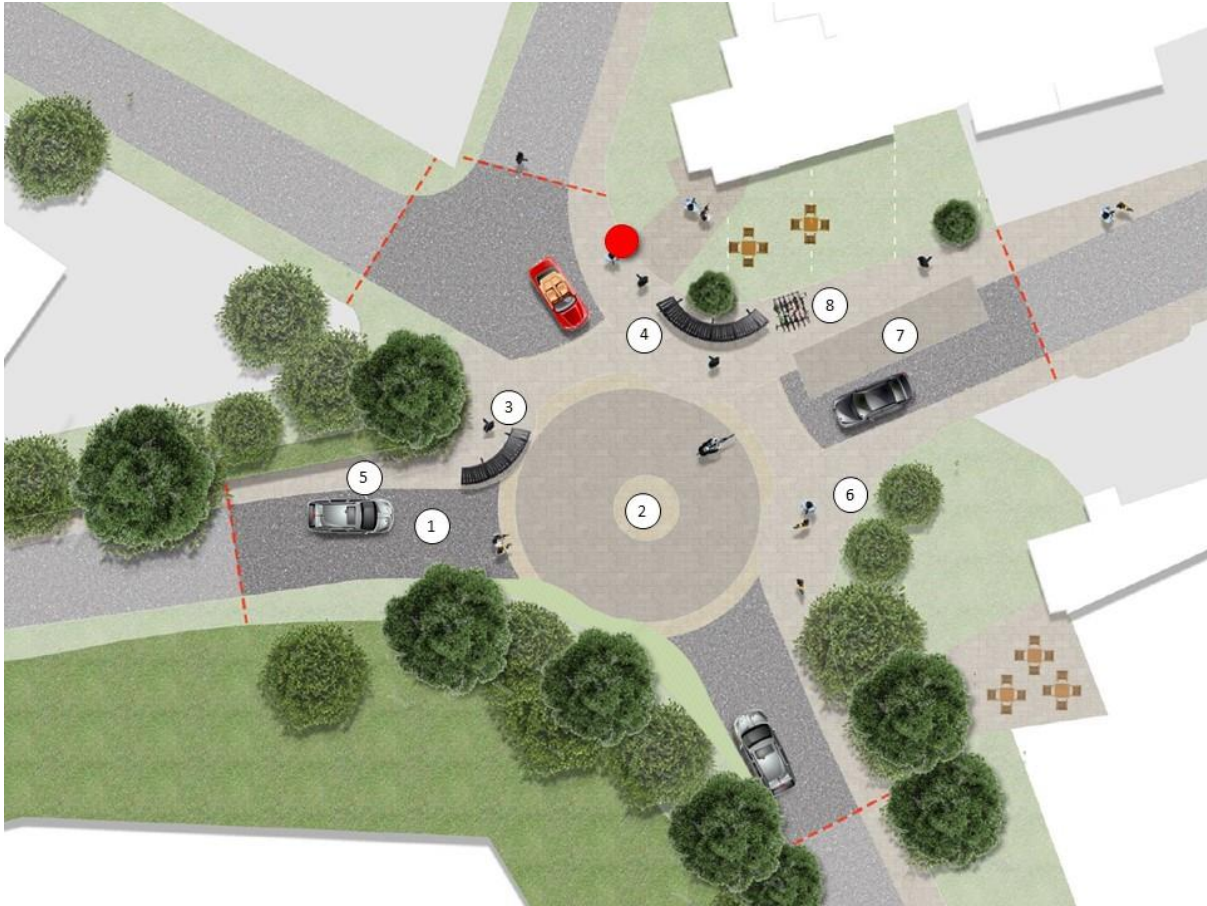
The first conclusions from the study were that the location is suitable for the introduction of an informal street environment. The areas that can be reclaimed from traffic are shown below:



Junction, showing areas that can be reclaimed for pedestrians

All traffic movements, and deliveries and collections from the local businesses, can continue exactly as they do now, and traffic speeds overall should be significantly reduced.

The reclaimed space can then be utilised to better serve the community. The suggested initial plan is shown below:



Key elements of the plan are:

1. the approach to the junction from Station Road west is kinked to the right to face towards the Baskerville. The effect of this is to reduce speeds by diverting drivers' sight-lines
2. The new paved area extending around 20m into each approach road will consist of concentric circles, giving the impression of roundabout priorities
3. Extensions to the pedestrian areas at each corner can be released, without impeding traffic movement or the manoeuvring of large vehicles. Seating and planting will dissuade parking on the pedestrian areas.
4. The area outside the shop will allow for wider access
5. The school bus pick-up and drop-off can take place in a much safer space, with ample room for adults to meet and assemble around the newly-refurbished telephone box
6. An extended area outside the Baskerville Arms could allow for new accessibility to the pub garden.
7. A strengthened reserved area for delivery vehicles is provided.
8. Possible site for a cycle rack.

Using best-practice experience from similar schemes around the country, signage will be strictly limited, and the dynamics of the space used to achieve the desired outcomes.

5 Benefits of the scheme

The new layout will provide a calmer, safer, more welcoming focal point to the village. It will encourage more visits especially on foot and by bicycle and provide local businesses with an opportunity to extend their offers.

Traffic speeds are expected to be reduced by around 10mph; access to the school bus will be safer and more convenient; short-term parking space will not be reduced but will be available outside the boundaries of the scheme on Station Road and Mill Road. The residents of Northfield Road have offered to continue to allow short-term parking along the north side of the highway.

9.2.6 Next Steps

Once the outline design concepts have received approval, a detailed design will take place, including street furniture, lighting, surface treatment, drainage, access to utilities, etc. Funding for the estimated £130k cost will be sought from a variety of sources.