

By: Neil Baker - Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport
Simon Jones - Corporate Director Growth, Environment and Transport

To: Scrutiny Committee, 1 November 2023

Subject: Vehicle Crossings (Dropped Kerbs)

Status: Unrestricted

Summary: This report provides a response to questions raised by the Chairman, Vice Chairman and Spokespeople of the Scrutiny Committee regarding the prevailing vehicle crossings (dropped kerbs) specification/policy.

Recommendation

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to **consider and note** the report on vehicle crossings.

Responses to questions raised.

1. What is a vehicle crossing?

A vehicle crossing provides the legal means to allow access to a property safely and easily, when using a car or other domestic vehicle. The kerbs are dropped from their normal height and the pavement or verge is strengthened to take the weight of the vehicle crossing it.

2. Why is it needed?

The Highway Authority does not allow residents to drive over a footway or verge unless a vehicle crossing has been authorised and installed. This is because damage may be caused to the footway and/or any pipes or cables / services that are buried underneath it. The crossing allows residents to pass safely from the carriageway to their property preventing any obstructions to the highway.

3. Permitted types of vehicles.

A domestic vehicle crossing may only be used by a private or light goods (or similar) vehicle. It may not be used by heavy goods vehicles (unless constructed to a higher specification) or mechanical equipment. If a delivery, such as a skip, is made to the property and in doing so the delivery damages the crossing, any repairs will be the sole responsibility of the occupier.

4. Is planning permission needed?

Planning permission is generally needed for either a new access or to amend an existing access if a property is located where the access is:-

- Located on a classified road (A/B/C)
- In a conservation area
- To an apartment/maisonette
- To a listed building
- Likely to affect a tree which is protected by a Tree Preservation Order
- Required for business purposes

To determine if an access requires planning permission applicants are advised to consult with their local planning authority department. It is important also to note that all properties subject to planning permission must also meet the KCC vehicle crossover criteria.

Planning permission may be required to hard surface parking areas, if the surface area to be covered is more than 5m square, planning permission will be needed to lay traditional, impermeable driveways that do not control rainwater running off onto roads.

5. National and local standards

Kent County Council assessment criteria is based on national safety / parking guidelines and measurements and seeks to ensure no hazardous manoeuvring on the highway is necessary, to obtain access to and from the property.

The criteria states the minimum standards and terms and conditions in order for a vehicle crossing to be approved by the Highway Authority.

The prevailing policy was adopted in September 2022 and updated the previous version by including the addition of parallel parking.

Parallel parking was introduced to give residents and officers greater flexibility in how measurements can be applied. This should make it more accessible for many properties to satisfy the required standards.

For parallel parking an applicant must have at least 3m depth and 6m width for the option to parallel or angle park. Kent County Council is one of only a few authorities who have adopted this additional option.

This approach does require extra consideration mainly due to the greater space required for a safe manoeuvre on and off the parking area, when compared to perpendicular parking. It also has the potential to reduce availability of on street parking.

It is understood that there may be change to the “Manual for Streets” which forms part of the national parking standards, and this will require a minimum depth of 5.0m for future parking spaces. Kent County Council as the Highway Authority currently require 4.8m.

The minimum depth condition is recognised as a critical requirement as many safety, operational and resident complaints are due to vehicles overhanging the footway. Overhanging vehicles can impact pedestrians, wheelchair and mobility scooters causing them to enter the live carriageway.

6. Vehicle size?

Residents sometimes highlight the size of car as a reason for requesting dispensation to the stipulated measurements.

Unfortunately, this cannot be a consideration as whilst one resident may have a small vehicle, we cannot assume that the resident or future residents will always have a vehicle of such scale. This could result in potential enforcement issues in the future.

7. Officer Training

The operational teams undertake regular training, to ensure compliance and consistency across the county. With the future changes to national standards and the digitalisation of our service, we plan to undertake a further review to enhance the service currently offered.

8. Complaints

Since the updated policy was introduced, we are not aware of any referrals coming back from the ombudsman, where they were unhappy with either the application process or how officers applied it.

9. Operational efficiencies

When it is possible to reduce officer time such as when two adjoining applications are received at the same time officers can review the applications as one case.

This would only require one initial site visit and supervision if constructed as one scheme and the Highways Authority is able to pass on this saving to the applicants.

Conclusion:

Kent County Council has a flexible and established approach to vehicle crossing policy and specification. This has evolved over many years and will continue to do so in line with national standards and where possible with local innovation and circumstance.

Whilst it will not be possible to cater for everybody's individual set of circumstances, the prevailing approach seeks to balance the needs of residents, road users and pedestrians safely and consistently.