

Open Letter from Mole Valley District Council and Surrey Police

Acoustic camera deployment in respect of anti-social behaviour from motorcycle riders

MVDC will be launching a consultation next week to better understand the impact of reported anti-social behaviour and excessive noise, mainly from motorbikes, on the A24 and the Old London Road around Mickleham and Westhumble.

The results of this consultation will be used to evaluate whether a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) should be introduced to provide further enforcement powers for agencies to help deal with the issue. This consultation will not be asking for opinions on potential enforcement methods, this would be for the Council and Police to decide based on consideration of the most effective options. However, there have already been calls in some quarters for the implementation of acoustic cameras to address the issue.

Acoustic cameras have been deployed in a small number of Council areas primarily in respect of gathering evidence to enforce anti-social behaviour and driving of cars, not motorcycles. Their efficacy in respect of capturing reliable information from motorcycles is still a matter of debate.

It is the position of Mole Valley District Council and Surrey Police that the deployment of acoustic cameras in Mole Valley is not currently considered to be an effective solution in response to the issues reported. This is due to the lack of convincing evidence of their effectiveness in providing data for enforcement for anti-social behaviour relating to motorcycles.

Under PSPOs in force in other areas, an acoustic camera is used to capture footage, triggered at a decibel level deemed to be appropriate, to determine whether a behaviour prohibited by the PSPO has been breached or other offences can be identified. Data from trials identify different decibel levels depending on the environment and road type.

If an acoustic camera is triggered by noise above the decibel threshold, images are captured. From these images it has to be decided whether anti-social behaviour, as described in the PSPO, has been committed. If behaviour which is prohibited by the PSPO is captured, then the offending vehicle has to be identified from the footage. This is a manual analysis involving examination of footage and is not an automated process.

Identification of the ‘offending’ vehicle

As bikers often ride in groups, the data shows that in some instances there are multiple bikes captured, resulting in difficulty, even where there are two motorbikes, in attributing the reading to a certain bike or indeed whether the total decibel level which triggers the camera is because of the cumulative effect.

Motorcycle numberplates are generally mounted on the back of the vehicle only and are more difficult to capture. Many have ‘flip’ plates, in themselves illegal if flipped up, which can make reading them more difficult. The evidence captured for cars is more effective since their number plates are visible from the front and rear.

Identification of the rider

If the vehicle in question can be positively identified, the next step is to understand who the rider is in order to enforce against the anti-social behaviour (ASB). Riders wear helmets, making by-eye identification impossible.

Since the evidence would be gathered under the powers provided by the PSPO, this specific legislation cannot require the registered keeper of a vehicle to identify who was riding the vehicle at a particular time. Whilst it is true to say that most bikes are ridden by their owners, this isn’t exclusive, and the burden of proof in relation to the identity of the perpetrator would require the Police to use additional legislation to compel the owner to disclose who was riding the motorbike.

Existing legal powers at the Police’s disposal.

The Police have a number of routes to enforcement for the types of behaviour being reported including:

- Sections 1 and 2 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 – Dangerous and careless driving.
- Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 for enforcing modified bikes.
- Motorcycle Noise Act 1987 for suppliers of adapted exhaust systems.
- Section 59 of the Police Reform Act 2002 - This legislation allows police officers to seize vehicles used in a manner that causes, or is likely to cause, alarm, distress, or annoyance to the public, or if the driving is deemed careless or inconsiderate under the Road Traffic Act 1988.

- Section 3 and Section 34 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 - These sections define careless and inconsiderate driving, and off-road driving without permission, respectively

Examples of implemented schemes and trials of Acoustic Cameras

The most prominent example of the roll out of Acoustic Cameras is in **The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea** where they were brought in primarily to deal with supercars.

Similarly **Norwich City Council** has introduced acoustic cameras to address ASB related to cars – the wording of the PSPO covers car related ASB such as doughnutting, drifting and handbrake turning.

Hertfordshire Police has instigated a 2 year trial of acoustic cameras in response to illegal car meets and street racing, funded by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. As well as the cameras, the pilot includes additional Police activity with more patrols and reinforcements to deliver enforcement using their existing powers. They are also working to reduce offences by closing access overnight to areas where cars have congregated.

Sussex Police did carry out a trial of acoustic cameras to tackle antisocial riding of motorcycles, in very similar circumstances to those issues being reported in Mole Valley. That trial did not provide sufficient evidence of their effectiveness to tackle this issue citing problems with identification of vehicle and rider. Following this trial, no permanent deployment of cameras was implemented.

The **Department for Transport** carried out 4 trials of acoustic cameras across different areas of the UK in late 2022 into 2023 and published the results of those trials later that year. In June 2025 the government stated that DfT had no plans to produce further guidance [for the police or local authorities] on noise cameras but is keeping up to date with any advancements in technology. The Under Secretary of State said it is ultimately for local authorities and the police to consider what the most appropriate enforcement routes may be for addressing issues with excessive vehicle noise within their area.

The cost/benefit analysis for the use of acoustic cameras to deal with motorcycles is not proven. It is considered that other enforcement options should be prioritised such as on the ground policing, which the Borough Commander is looking to increase. The leaseholder of Ryka's and its loyal community also wish to work with us to discourage anti-social behaviour and have already implemented some measures to do so.



Mole Valley District Council, with the support of Surrey Police, is continuing its plans to go out to consultation on the implementation of a Public Spaces Protection Order covering this area later this month. A PSPO could increase the opportunity for more agencies to have powers to support the police in the identification and enforcement of the reported ASB.

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