

DSA Questions & Responses

1. Why was the decision taken to close the Kidderminster Test Centre?

The Driving Standards Agency (DSA) is a self-financing organisation, reliant upon test fee income for the provision of its services and the Agency needs to ensure it can deliver a cost-effective service to avoid unnecessary costs which would have to be recovered from its customers via the test fee.

Consequently, when the opportunity arises e.g. lease break/expiries, the Agency reviews its estate taking into account the continued operational suitability of the location & the facilities it offers; the customer base; the creation of the national network Multi Purpose Test Centres (MPTC) linked to the introduction of a new motorcycle test in Autumn 2008 and the proximity of these and any other suitable alternative centres bearing in mind that most practical test customers should not have to travel more than our travel distance criterion of 7, 20 and 30 miles depending on the population density of the area. The distance criterion applicable to Kidderminster is 20 miles.

As the Kidderminster site is Freehold, the Agency did not have to wait for a lease event to review its requirements in the town. Given the poor overall condition of the Kidderminster premises and that there are 3 alternative facilities within the distance criteria located at Lower Gornal, Redditch, and Worcester the Agency has taken the opportunity to make efficiency savings by closing the Kidderminster centre. Operationally, the alternative centres meet the Agency's requirements in terms of test routes, customer and staff facilities and will have the spare capacity to absorb the diversion of demand without compromising waiting time service targets.

2. The DSA owns the building on Castle Road, Kidderminster, why was this building not maintained, was this a contributing factor towards the decision to close the centre? Have the Agency considered sale and leaseback?

In reviewing its options in Kidderminster, the Agency considered improving the existing accommodation; relocating to alternative premises within the town & serving Kidderminster from neighbouring centres within the 20 mile travel distance criterion applicable to the area.

3. Did the DSA attempt to locate other suitable accommodation in the district? If so, are you able to provide a list of sites considered?

A property in Dixon Road, was identified but this property was not considered to have satisfied all of the criteria required by the Agency.

4. Could you confirm why Kidderminster was selected for closure over neighbouring test centres such as Redditch?

As indicated above, the Agency reviews its estate when the opportunity arises bearing in mind factors referred to. Whilst Redditch is also a Freehold site, the population density based travel distance criterion applicable to that location is 7 miles. There are no alternative facilities within the travel distance criterion applicable to Redditch.

5. What are the site requirements for a car test centre, including parking facilities?

Location

Access required to and from national speed limit roads (non-motorway) and a variety of traffic hazards & road conditions within the time assigned for the test (30-35 minutes)

Should not be areas prone to congestion and ideally not near schools or emergency service buildings.

Property

- *Preferably ground floor accommodation.*
- *DDA compliant access.*
- *Office space capable of accommodating at least 11m³ per member of staff*
- *Separate male & female staff toilets*
- *Staff kitchenette/mess facilities*
- *Waiting area – size dependent on number of staff employed and tests carried out*
- *Separate male & female customer toilet (one of which should be DDA compliant)*
- *Store room*
- *Dedicated off street parking ideally with separate access & egress points (number of spaces dependent on number of staff employed and tests carried out – this equates to the staff in post figure x 2)*

6. Has the DSA ever considered Kidderminster as a site for a Multi Purpose Test Centre?

No.

7. What are the long term plans with regard to Multi Purpose Test Centres? Is it envisaged that eventually they will replace all car test centres and be rolled out to more areas?

No. The national network of MPTC's are specifically being introduced to ensure compliance with European Community Directive 2000/56/EC

(published in the Official Journal of the European Communities. Volume 43, 21 September 2000). This directive introduces significant changes to the practical test for motorcyclists, all of which will demand a higher level of competence to be shown by learner motorcycle riders. In essence, the changes set extra and more demanding special manoeuvres which must be undertaken at speeds of between 30 and 50km/h. For road safety reasons, these new manoeuvres cannot be carried out on the public highway and so require the creation of a safe, off-road area for testing. DSA did not own or lease any sites which provide a sufficient area upon which to conduct the new motorcycle off-road manoeuvres.

The criterion for establishing the national network of MPTC sites is that most motorcycle candidates will have to travel no more than twenty miles or forty five minutes It is planned to establish 66 MPTCs sites across the country.

Given the significant cost in establishing the MPTC network it is essential that these new centres are utilised effectively. To achieve this, the Agency will co-locate neighbouring centres taking into account the appropriate travel distance criterion.

8. Is there any demographic information available regarding the areas from which users of Kidderminster test centre are from?

Please find attached Map Information for the period Mar – Aug 2007 showing where customers taking their tests in Kidderminster live. This reflects that a significant element come from the south west Birmingham/Lower Gornal areas.

9. The DSA's population density based approach to locating facilities would appear to disadvantage those towns, cities and/or network of towns which happen to have a sizeable rural area within the administrative boundaries. Does the agency have an alternative methodology for considering test facilities in such circumstances?

No. The current service level boundaries setting the distances candidates are required to travel to practical test centres, were agreed by Ministers in 1998, following Customer Surveys conducted in 1993 and 1995, and adopted in August 1998. Customer surveys were conducted for the years 2001/2, 2002/3, 2003/4 and 2004/5 using independent market research consultants ORC International. Candidates were asked if they were satisfied with the distance travelled to test centres. The results showed that over 82% of our candidates for practical driving tests were very satisfied or satisfied with the distance they had to travel. DSA is therefore not considering revising the distance criteria for Practical Car Test Centres.

10. **According to recent information posted on the UK Parliament site, the DSA anticipates that drivers who would have opted to take their test at Kidderminster will now choose to take their test in Lower Gornal, what is the rationale behind this?**

Candidates will have a choice of alternative centres within the distance criteria these are Lower Gornal, Redditch, and Worcester. MAPINFO reflects that Kidderminster was attracting demand from the south west Birmingham/Lower Gornal areas.

11. **The DSA is part of the Driver and Vehicle Operator Group (DVO) which includes the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) which has a recently updated facility at Hoo Farm. Have the DSA considered sharing facilities with VOSA?**

No.

12. **Two of the priorities outlined in the DVO's Group Plan 2007-2011 are to:**
- i. **Improve journey time and reliability on roads**
 - ii. **Reduce environmental impact, crime and anti social behaviour**

Could you explain how these priorities will be met when driving instructors and learner drivers will be accruing more mileage as they will have substantially further to travel to alternative test centres?

The Driving Standards Agency advocates safe driving for life. In the interests of road safety, instructors should be teaching their pupils to drive not to simply follow test routes. I am sure you will appreciate that once the test is passed, these new drivers will be faced with putting the skills they have learnt into practice unaccompanied, in areas previously unknown to them.

Experience should therefore be gained in a variety roads and traffic conditions and locations within the lesson period in order to prepare pupils not only for their test but their future driving "career". There is no need to have every lesson at the test centre location. Limiting visits to pre test familiarisation will minimise any environmental impact

13. **Has any work been conducted into the environmental impact of the additional journeys driving instructors and learner drivers would be making to alternative test centres?**

See response to 12.

14. **Has the DSA investigated the potential cost increases Learner Drivers from Wyre Forest District could face due to the increase in time they would have to hire the instructors car for on the day of the test?**

As stated previously DSA advocates safe driving for life. In the interests of their future driving career, Instructors should be teaching pupils to drive not simply follow test routes. There is no need to have every lesson at the test centre location. Limiting visits to pre test familiarisation will also minimise any increased costs being passed on to their pupils.

- 15. Driving instructors are anticipating that they may be requested to meet learner drivers at test centres to reduce the amount of time the vehicle has to be hired for. This would mean a loss of earnings for driving instructors and additional environmental impact as there would be two cars travelling to the test centre, is the DSA aware of this scenario?**

Not every town/city has driving test centre. Not all instructors/learner drivers live in locations that have driving test centres. The Agency is not aware of such a scenario currently existing in respect of these locations.

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