

EXTRACT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 29 MAY 2012

Councillors Present: Jeff Beck (Substitute) (In place of Brian Bedwell), Dominic Boeck, Jeff Brooks (Vice-Chairman), Virginia von Celsing, Marcus Franks, Dave Goff, Mike Johnston, David Rendel, Tony Vickers, Quentin Webb and Emma Webster

Also Present: John Ashworth (Corporate Director - Environment), Steve Broughton (Head of Culture & Environmental Protection), Nick Carter (Chief Executive), Andrew Garratt (Principal Engineer (Traffic Management and Road Safety)), Chris Jones (Arts and Leisure Services Manager), Councillor David Betts (Highways, Transport (Operational), ICT & Corporate Services, Customer Services), Councillor Hilary Cole (Countryside, Environmental Protection, "Cleaner Greener", Culture), Councillor Richard Crumly, Councillor Carol Jackson-Doerge, David Lowe (Scrutiny & Partnerships Manager), Councillor Gwen Mason and Elaine Walker (Principal Policy Officer)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Brian Bedwell

Councillor(s) Absent: Councillor David Holtby

PART I

3. Item Called-In following an Individual Decision: A4 Bath Road, Padworth - proposed 50mph speed limit

The Commission considered a report concerning the Call In Item ID2470 – A4 Bath Road, Padworth – proposed 50mph speed limit which was approved by Individual Decision on 26 April 2012.

Councillor Brooks noted that although Councillor Dominic Boeck had signed the Call In, his ability to debate the issue as a member of the Commission had not been compromised.

(Note: 6:40pm - Councillor Virginia von Celsing joined the meeting)

Andrew Garratt summarised the background to this item, informing the Commission that in 2006 the national guidance for setting speed limits was altered. As a result, the Council undertook a review of the speed limits on all 'A' and 'B' roads, and concluded that this section of the A4 in Padworth should be considered as a candidate for a reduced speed limit. The proposal was considered by the Speed Limit Task Group consisting of two Officers, two Councillors and the Police, who requested further information before making their recommendation. Additional surveys were carried out along the section of road, and in December 2010, the Task Group recommended that a 50mph speed limit be set for the single carriageway section. During the consultation period, one objection was received.

Councillor David Betts clarified that several sections of the A4 had been reviewed by the Task Group, but that only this section had been identified for a reduction in the speed limit. He further advised that Beenham Parish Council had contacted him to express their support for the new speed limit.

In response to questions received from the Commission, Andrew Garratt was able to clarify that:

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION - 29 MAY 2012 - MINUTES

- There were a number of reasons for the recommendation to have been put forward. These included the changes to national guidelines, the number of accidents, the current mean speed of vehicles, and the nature of the development and junctions along the stretch of road;
- There were a number of businesses and residential developments in this location with traffic entering and exiting those sites;
- Over the last three years there had been 14 injury accidents, four of which had involved turning movements;
- There had been three survey locations each identifying different mean speeds, the highest of which was 42mph.

Councillor Brooks asked for clarification as to why a speed limit was required when the mean speed limit along the road was lower than the proposed limit. Andrew Garratt explained that the decision was not based solely on the mean speed of vehicles. The number of accidents was also considered and guidance indicated that a visible speed limit would highlight the need for greater caution.

Councillor Vickers asked whether speed had been a contributory factor in the accidents that had occurred. Andrew Garratt responded that it had been a factor in many of them especially where they involved a car moving at low speed when turning or preparing to turn onto or off the road being hit by a car travelling at speed.

The Commission considered the causes of two fatal accidents and were advised that one occurred in a location outside of the proposed speed limit, and one occurred near a roundabout where speed was unlikely to be a factor.

Councillor Rendel questioned whether it was possible to reach speeds exceeding 50mph when travelling eastwards as a roundabout on the section acted as a natural traffic calming measure. Andrew Garratt responded that it was relatively easy in current vehicles. Councillor Rendel was concerned that when travelling westwards from the dual carriageway section of road, that the speed limit would drop significantly from 70mph to 50mph.

Councillor Dave Goff asked if it would be possible to model whether a lower speed limit would have affected the accidents that had occurred. Andrew Garratt replied that it would be difficult to model, however it was known that drivers' reaction time was an important factor in accidents, and reducing the speed allowed more time to react thereby reducing the likelihood of an accident occurring. Andrew Garratt continued that 50mph speed limits had been introduced on the A340 towards Tidmarsh, and the A338 towards Great Shefford, and these had proven to be successful in reducing speed and accidents.

Councillor Mike Johnston expressed the view that as many accidents occurred when turning onto or off the road, a better solution would be to improve access and junctions. He continued that he did not expect there to be a significant improvement to the accident record by reducing the speed limit by 10mph. Andrew Garratt responded that there was evidence that a change of this order was effective.

Councillor Betts reminded the Commission that all of the facts had been carefully examined by the Speed Limit Task Group, and that these individuals were experts who took their role very seriously. The Task Group did not recommend changes to speed limits without good cause.

Councillor Quentin Webb considered that a slower and more constant stream of traffic would make it more difficult to turn onto the A4. Andrew Garratt did not expect this to be a problem and noted that the lower speed limit would make it easier and safer for drivers to match the speed of other traffic.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION - 29 MAY 2012 - MINUTES

Councillor Marcus Franks asked how the accident record on this stretch of the A4 compared to the rest of the A4. Andrew Garratt responded that it was worse, with 14 accidents here and 30 in total between the A340 roundabouts. He noted that the A4 had a generally good accident record, but there were a greater number of junctions and turnings along this section than elsewhere. Andrew Garratt informed the Commission of a similar issue at a single junction near Kintbury which had been addressed successfully by the installation of a traffic island, however this would not be suitable in Padworth due to the number of turnings involved.

Councillor Vickers requested further information about the police's view of the proposed speed limit as they had not responded to the consultation. Andrew Garratt confirmed that the police were supportive of the proposed limit and, as part of the Speed Limit Task Group, had approved the recommendation, and that they did not routinely respond to consultations unless they had concerns.

Councillor Goff asked whether any other options had been considered. Andrew Garratt replied that other options would involve significant engineering works with their associated costs and disruption.

Councillor Brooks invited Andrew Garratt to respond to each of the ten reasons put forward for the Call In:

1	It will be unenforceable.	The speed limit would be signed in accordance with the regulations and have a supporting Traffic Regulation Order making it legal. The police would enforce all speed limits and this would be no exception.
2	This is a main transport route and any reduction will limit the amount of throughput the channel can handle.	As the mean speeds were lower than the speed limit, there would be no effect on capacity of the road.
3	The reduction may have an adverse effect on commuters and other users getting to and from the M4.	As there would be little change to the actual speed of road users, there would be no adverse effect on commuters.
4	The reduction may cause traffic to migrate elsewhere to less suitable roads.	Alternative routes would require a lengthy journey through villages such as Beenham and Bucklebury. It was considered unlikely that drivers would select this option to avoid a short stretch of the A4.
5	The accident record does not justify a speed limit reduction.	National guidelines were clear about when the number of accidents justified a certain speed limit. The proposal was in line with these guidelines.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION - 29 MAY 2012 - MINUTES

6	Any perceived hazard at the junction of the dual carriageway with the Beenham Road can be curtailed by ensuring the traffic exiting Beenham can only turn left.	Altering the junction with the Beenham Road allowing only left turn out of the junction would result in drivers turning further up the A4 and potentially undertaking a U-turn on the dual carriageway section posing even greater danger than at present.
7	The accident record on this stretch of road is good.	The accident record had been discussed already.
8	There have been two accidents reported recently, neither of which should be used as a justification for reducing the speed limit and one of them was a wholly exceptional incident where an elderly man was being pushed across the road in a wheelchair.	The accident record had been discussed already.
9	We have driven to and fro along the road on many occasions and never seen a pedestrian seeking to cross at any time.	A new residential development has been constructed which will result in a greater number of pedestrians looking to cross the road. The two fatal accidents involved pedestrians.
10	The stretch of dual carriageway, in particular, is quite inappropriate for a limit as low as 50 mph. The problem on our roads at the present time is congestion, not the speed of traffic. In fact, the high element of congestion tends to reduce the speed of traffic naturally.	The proposed speed limit was in line with national guidance

Councillor Richard Crumly was invited to address the Commission and expand on his reasons for calling in the decision. Councillor Crumly advised that he believed:

- The decision was inappropriate and would like the Commission to recommend it be reviewed;
- The speed limit should remain unchanged, and this had been supported by a resident of Sulham who had provided a number of arguments for this;
- The roundabout on the A4 forced drivers to slow down or stop, acting as a natural speed break;
- The road was historically the main road between London and Bristol and was largely a wide, straight road suitable for higher speeds;
- He had never witnessed a pedestrian crossing the road at the point in question;
- That development along the road did not encourage pedestrians to cross, as where there were built up areas, there was nothing opposite;

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION - 29 MAY 2012 - MINUTES

- Neither of the fatal accidents referred to should be used to justify a speed limit, due to the other factors involved;
- It was inappropriate to reduce the speed limit on the dual carriageway section of road;
- Restricting movement from the junction with Beenham Road to allow left turns only would improve safety, as it had been seen to be effective elsewhere;
- That setting a speed limit in line with the 85th percentile of mean speeds would be more appropriate as fewer drivers would be penalised, and these would be more serious offenders;

Councillor Crumly clarified his statement that the speed limit would be unenforceable by referring to the fact that the police did not comment on the consultation. In his opinion, he felt they might not have the enthusiasm to patrol the area, and might not have locations in which to set up speed detection vehicles;

Councillor Crumly concluded by asking the Commission not to rely solely on figures, but to use their experience of driving on the road to consider whether the reduced speed limit was required;

Councillor Vickers informed the Commission that he had undertaken an informal consultation on the issue amongst his contacts. The result had indicated overwhelming support for maintaining the existing speed limit.

Councillor Webb asked how emerging traffic would be prevented from turning right onto the A4 and where this could be implemented. Andrew Garratt responded that it would be achieved by installing or extending a central reservation which was an expensive option and would require consultation. Indications were that businesses along the road would object as it would affect their customers. He reminded the Commission that this method would affect turning in to properties as well as out.

Councillor Webster expressed the view that the Speed Limit Task Group had made an informed decision based on facts and their expert knowledge of the subject. Councillor Webster proposed that the Commission endorse the Individual Decision.

Councillor Rendel informed the Commission that although he had originally been in agreement with the decision, the discussion had raised issues which caused him to reconsider. He was particularly concerned about the introduction of a 50mph speed limit at the point that the dual carriageway became single carriageway as drivers would need to slow down in anticipation of the lower limit whilst still on the dual carriageway. He believed that this would be detrimental to drivers whose ability to overtake on this section of dual carriageway would be compromised.

Councillor Brooks concurred with this point, and noted that drivers would not have another opportunity to overtake a slow vehicle, and this might encourage drivers to risk overtaking on a single carriageway section.

Councillor Betts addressed the Commission and stated that he respected the group and would respect any decision reached, however he pointed out that the decision had been viewed by the Speed Limit Task Group twice, and had been through the ID process during which time it had been open to Member comments. Given the information that had been presented to him, he had been satisfied with the recommendation from the Task Group.

Councillor Webb proposed that the Commission recommend the decision be reconsidered by the Portfolio Holder for Highways. This was seconded by Councillor Goff. At the vote this was carried.

RESOLVED that the A4 Bath Road, Padworth, Proposed 50mph Speed Limit be referred back to the Portfolio Holder for Highways for reconsideration.