
Theale Village Pilot 20mph Project

Committee considering report:	Individual Executive Member Decisions
Date of Committee:	2 August 2024
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Stuart Gourley
Report Author:	Neil Stacey
Forward Plan Ref:	ID4573

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To summarise the responses to the statutory consultation of the proposed 20mph speed limit scheme in Theale and to make recommendations as to how to proceed in light of the comments received.
- 1.2 To discuss potential implications for future similar schemes.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that:
 - (a) The proposed speed limit order is introduced as advertised.
 - (b) The following issues are noted in respect of the implementation and monitoring of this pilot project and any subsequent projects:
 - i) Post-implementation monitoring of vehicle speeds is required to gauge compliance with new speed limits.
 - ii) Thames Valley Police have made it clear that no additional enforcement for newly lowered speed limits will be carried out over and above their current routine activity.
 - iii) Speed limits should be “self-enforcing” but where vehicle speeds are not within an acceptable margin of the speed limit, further measures may be required to promote compliance, which would in turn require additional funding. Alternatively, speed limits which do not achieve sufficient compliance may need to be reconsidered.
 - iv) Further work may be required in subsequent projects to obtain greater engagement in the consultation process from residents, in order to be able to demonstrate local support for speed limit reductions.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
<p>Financial:</p>	<p>The project is funded from the existing capital budget associated with speed limit changes and is anticipated to cost approximately £5,000. Should further 20mph limits be implemented, it is estimated that the cost of the physical work to replace signs would cost an average of approximately £3,170 per kilometre of road covered.</p> <p>If observed vehicle speeds are not within an acceptable margin of a newly lowered speed limit, there may be a requirement for physical measures to promote compliance, such as traffic calming or interactive signing. The cost of installing and maintaining these measures is not included within the project budget.</p> <p>There is an ongoing financial cost in respect of the maintenance of speed limit signing, noting that 30mph limits do not generally require “repeater” signs, but 20mph limits do. Traffic signs have a long life and would not need wholesale replacement for many years, but in order for a speed limit to be legally enforceable all signs within the limit need to be present and correct. Signs may be damaged, vandalised or overgrown by vegetation and should therefore be checked periodically. Painted “20” markings on the carriageway may also be used to reinforce a speed limit, but these deteriorate relatively quickly and would require more regular maintenance.</p>
<p>Human Resource:</p>	<p>Whilst not creating an immediate or significant financial pressure, the installation of more traffic signs places additional workload on the Officers responsible for inspecting and maintaining them.</p>
<p>Legal:</p>	<p>The speed limit order will need to be sealed by the Legal Services Team.</p>
<p>Risk Management:</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Property:</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Policy:</p>	<p>This project is a pilot scheme which will inform the development of future policies and processes in respect of 20mph speed limits.</p>

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		x		
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		x		
Environmental Impact:		x		The introduction of a 20mph speed limit may lead to an increased propensity to walk and cycle among local residents, thereby decreasing vehicle emissions and improving local air quality. There would also be a benefit if vehicles are driven at a constant 20mph speed, rather than accelerating and braking to account for local hazards and conditions. Ultimately, the effect on emissions and air quality from vehicles will depend largely on how they are driven. Given the relatively small area covered by this proposed restriction and the small number of motor vehicles involved, an in-depth analysis has not been carried out. The overall environmental effect has therefore been assessed as being neutral.

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Health Impact:	x			The introduction of a 20mph speed limit may lead to increased propensity to walk and cycle among local residents, thereby promoting active and healthy lifestyles.
ICT Impact:		x		
Digital Services Impact:		x		
Council Strategy Priorities:	x			This project is relevant to Council Strategy Priority no. 5, Thriving Communities with a Strong Local Voice, in that it will implement a 20mph speed limit in an area where there is public support.
Core Business:		x		Although contributing to the above Council Strategy Priority and wider social and environmental objectives, the delivery of this type of project is not in itself a statutory service.
Data Impact:		x		

Consultation and Engagement:	<p>Local stakeholders and road users were consulted on the proposed speed limit by way of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Statutory advertisement of a Traffic Order, including newspaper and online publication (May-June 2024).• Officer attendance at a meeting of Theale Parish Council (May 2024). <p>This report has been circulated to the local ward member, shadow portfolio holder and minority group leader.</p> <p>Councillor Alan Macro, the ward member for Theale, stated that he is fully supportive of the scheme. He also pointed out that some roads in Theale had previously been the subject of petitions requesting 20mph speed limits, with over 100 signatures received, and that these should be taken into account when evaluating local support for the proposals.</p> <p>Any other comments received prior to the date of the Individual Decision will be reported verbally.</p>
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4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 This report highlights the feedback received during the statutory consultation of a proposed Traffic Order which would reduce the speed limit on various roads in Theale. The purpose of this report is to enable a decision to be made as to whether the scheme is implemented as advertised, modified or withdrawn. In view of the local support, it is recommended that the proposal is implemented as advertised.
- 4.2 This project is a pilot project which is intended to shape future policies and processes in respect of 20mph speed limits. The report therefore also discusses issues arising from the consultation and learning points from the project to date which are relevant to future schemes.

5 Introduction/Background

Introduction

- 5.1 A statutory consultation on a proposal to introduce lower speed limits on various roads in Theale was held between 25th April and 6th June 2024. The main part of the proposal was to reduce the speed limit on the majority of residential roads in the parish from 30mph to 20mph, but three roads were proposed to be reduced from either 40mph or the national speed limit to 30mph. This project resulted from a motion to Council in March 2023, which proposed more widespread use of 20mph speed limits, and was addressed by a resolution of the Council's Executive in November 2023 (ref EX4435). Specifically, the Executive resolved to undertake a pilot project

with a view to adopting new criteria for the use of 20mph speed limits and introducing further 20mph speed limits across the district based on the outcome of the pilot.

Background

- 5.2 The Council, as the Local Highway Authority, has powers under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to set the speed limits on the roads for which it is responsible. In order to be legally enforceable, speed limits require a legal order to be made under various sections of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. The process of consulting on and making speed limit orders is set out in the Local Authorities' Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996. The signing of speed limits is governed by the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2016, and a Local Highway Authority is not permitted to erect speed limit signs unless a legal Order is in force.
- 5.3 When determining local speed limits, the Council follows the Department for Transport guidance document "[Setting Local Speed Limits](http://www.gov.uk)" (www.gov.uk). In respect of 20mph speed limits, the guidance makes the following important points:
- a) 20mph zones and limits are now widespread. But that does not mean they should be introduced to every road. There should be careful consideration of the safety case and local support, to ensure their use is appropriate.
 - b) There is clear evidence of the effect of reducing traffic speeds on the reduction of collisions and casualties, as collision frequency is lower at lower speeds, and where collisions do occur, there is a lower risk of fatal injury at lower speeds.
 - c) Benefits of 20mph may include encouragement of healthier modes of travel, such as walking and cycling, and with potential environmental benefits.
 - d) Schemes need to aim for compliance with the new speed limit. Where new limits are put in, they should be in places where most drivers are likely to comply. Compliance is better on smaller, narrower roads than on wider roads where the layout gives drivers a clear run.
 - e) Successful 20mph zones and 20mph speed limits are generally self-enforcing: that is, the existing conditions of the road together with measures such as traffic calming or signing, publicity and information as part of the scheme, lead to a mean traffic speed compliant with the speed limit. To achieve compliance, there should be no expectation on the police to provide additional enforcement beyond their routine activity unless this has been explicitly agreed.
- 5.4 The Council Strategy 2023-27 includes five priorities, including "Thriving Communities with a Strong Local Voice". Within this priority there is a commitment to "work with local communities and partners to enhance our main towns and large villages" and a key initiative to implement "20mph zones where communities want them".
- 5.5 The previous work done on 20mph speed limits determined that it would not be cost effective or manageable to implement 20mph speed limits on a street-by-street basis in response to individual requests from the community and that an area-wide approach was preferable. Furthermore, introducing 20mph speed limits on roads with particular characteristics on an area-wide basis, rather than on specific roads in response to individual requests, is considered more likely to have a positive impact on vehicle speeds because drivers' expectations of what a 20mph "looks and feels like"

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would be re-set. It would also enable publicity to be targeted towards road users as new limits were introduced.

- 5.6 It should be stressed that this does not mean that the default 30mph speed limit is proposed to reduce to 20mph in the same way that the Welsh Government did in 2023. In this pilot project, all the residential roads in Theale were assessed against draft criteria to determine whether they are suitable to be reduced to 20mph limits. The draft criteria include the following factors:
- (a) The road classification and type – residential no-through-roads are more likely to be suitable for 20mph limits and “main” or distributor roads less suitable.
 - (b) The level of roadside development – densely built up and populated areas are more likely to be suitable for 20mph limits than sparsely populated areas.
 - (c) The presence of schools – although 20mph speed limits and lower speeds are generally desirable in the vicinity of schools, many schools are situated on “main” roads and it may not be realistic to expect vehicles to be driven at 20mph outside school hours; this may require measures which target particular times of day.
 - (d) The numbers of pedestrians and cyclists – roads with high pedestrian and cyclist activity would be more suitable for 20mph speed limits.
- 5.7 Whilst the safety record of a road in terms of the frequency of injury accidents may also be taken into account, the reality is that speed-related accidents are thankfully very rare in residential areas of West Berkshire and therefore it is unlikely that a reduction in speed limit will directly lead to a demonstrable reduction in the frequency or severity of accidents.
- 5.8 When setting speed limits, a further consideration is the location and number of signs that are required to give effect to the restriction. Excessive transitions between different limits should be avoided and it is important that signs are readily visible at transition points.

Consultation process and results

- 5.9 Considering all the above factors, a series of proposals were made for the speed limits in Theale. The statutory consultation document and plans showing existing and proposed speed limits are shown in Appendices A, B and C respectively. A statutory consultation on the proposals was held between 25th April and 6th June 2024 and included:
- (a) Notices placed in local newspapers.
 - (b) Correspondence with statutory consultees, including Thames Valley Police.
 - (c) Advertisement on the Council’s website at westberks.gov.uk/theale20mph.
 - (d) Officer attendance at a meeting of Theale Parish Council on 29th April 2024.

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- 5.10 A press release from the Council, social media posts and an article in the Residents' Bulletin publicised the consultation, which was also covered on local news websites including the Reading Chronicle, Newbury Today and BBC Berkshire.
- 5.11 A total of 54 responses to the consultation were received, of which 26 were in favour of the proposals and 22 were against or included a specific objection. Six responses were neutral. 53 responses were from members of the public, whilst one was from Thames Valley Police, responding in their capacity as a statutory consultee.
- 5.12 Of the public responses, 23 were from residents of Theale and 21 from residents living outside Theale. Although the consultation documents asked for respondents to include their address, nine replies were received from members of the public who did not state their address. 14 of the Theale residents were in favour of the proposals, with seven against and two neutral.
- 5.13 Theale has a population of approximately 3,000, therefore the 23 replies represent a response rate of less than 1%, which is disappointing considering the publicity that the consultation received.
- 5.14 Despite the low response rate, it should be noted that several roads within Theale, including Crown Lane, Blossom Lane and Meadow Way, were the subject of petitions requesting 20mph speed limits in 2021. The petitions were signed by over 100 residents.
- 5.15 A summary of the consultation responses and brief Officer comments is included in Appendix D. The following paragraphs summarise the most frequently raised points of concern and objection to the proposed speed limits.

Recurring themes raised by objectors

- 5.16 Enforcement – Some respondents believed that, without enforcement, the 20mph speed limits would not be respected; others were concerned that the limits would be rigorously enforced in order to generate income from fines.

Officer comment – The Council has no powers to enforce speed limits, which can only be enforced by the police. The majority of roads included in the project are residential, with frequent junctions, curved alignments, on-street parking and/or existing traffic calming in place. As such, speeds are already low and a 20mph speed limit would be largely “self-enforcing”. See also paragraph 5.21 below.

- 5.17 Compliance on Church Street – It was pointed out that (unlike the above comment) Church Street is largely wide and straight with good visibility and that drivers are unlikely to drive at 20mph.

Officer Comment – It is fair to say that the layout of Church Street is less likely to make the proposed 20mph speed limit “self-enforcing”. However, there are two schools and a pre-school day nursery located on Church Street, along with a library, a pub and two zebra crossings. There is also, therefore, a higher concentration of vulnerable road users, ie pedestrians and cyclists. Lower speeds are desirable on a road with these characteristics, which is why the reduction to 20mph has been proposed. Should the lower limit be implemented, this road will be closely monitored

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and further speed surveys carried out. If these surveys show that speeds are not within an acceptable margin of 20mph, physical measures may be required or the suitability of the speed limit reconsidered.

- 5.18 Perceived failure of 20mph schemes elsewhere in the UK – Some respondents raised the examples of Wales and Oxfordshire, which have introduced widespread 20mph speed limits.

Officer Comment – It would not be appropriate to comment in detail on other authorities' projects, but it should be stressed that the Council is not proposing to implement 20mph speed limits on a "blanket" basis but after careful consideration of the characteristics of each road, in line with the Department for Transport guidance.

- 5.19 Funding – several responses suggested that funds could be better spent on other projects and services.

Officer Comment – Opinions will vary as to the relative merits of the services and projects that local authorities provide. The Council has made a policy decision to implement 20mph speed limits where there is support among local residents, which forms part of the Council Strategy.

- 5.20 Environmental concerns – It has been suggested that congestion and pollution will be increased as a result of the lower speed limits.

Officer Comment – The introduction of a 20mph speed limit may lead to an increased propensity to walk and cycle among local residents, thereby decreasing vehicle emissions and improving local air quality. There would also be a benefit if vehicles are driven at a constant 20mph speed, rather than accelerating and braking to account for local hazards and conditions. Ultimately, the effect on emissions and air quality from vehicles will depend largely on how they are driven. Given the relatively small area covered by this proposed restriction and the small number of motor vehicles involved, an in-depth analysis has not been carried out. The overall environmental effect has therefore been assessed as being neutral.

- 5.21 Evidence/Data – It has been pointed out that the consultation documents did not reference evidence from accident or speed data.

Officer Comment – As noted above, speed-related accidents are thankfully very rare in residential areas of West Berkshire and therefore it is unlikely that a reduction in speed limit will directly lead to a demonstrable reduction in the frequency or severity of accidents. However, speed data was considered and indicated that the majority of proposed speed limits would be self-enforcing by virtue of the road environment. Should this project go ahead, "before and after" speed data will be compared in order to gauge its effectiveness and to inform future projects.

Consultation response from Thames Valley Police

- 5.22 Whilst Thames Valley Police have confirmed that they do not wish to formally object to the proposed speed limit order, they did express a number of reservations. Their response is reproduced in Appendix D, with Officer Comments also included.

5.23 The most significant comment is that “there is no agreement from Thames Valley Police to enforce these speed limits over and above our routine activity”. This reinforces the need for 20mph speed limits to be self-enforcing and there should therefore be no expectation that the Police will undertake additional enforcement to achieve compliance where speed limits are reduced.

6 Options for consideration

6.1 The following paragraphs outline the three options in respect of the proposed speed limit order that has been subject to statutory consultation.

Amend the proposed speed limit order

6.2 Some consultees have suggested amendments or additions to the proposed speed limits. These suggestions have been addressed in the “Officer Comment” section of Appendix D and it is not considered necessary to make any changes to the proposals.

Do not implement the proposed speed limit order

6.3 As outlined above, the statutory consultation has resulted in a significant number of objections, which have been given due consideration.

Implement the proposed speed limit order as advertised

6.4 Overall, slightly more respondents to the statutory consultation were in favour of the proposed speed limit order than were against. Residents of Theale were more strongly in favour than against.

7 Proposals

7.1 In view of the above, it is proposed that the speed limit order is implemented as advertised.

8 Conclusion

8.1 Despite a number of objections, the statutory consultation process has shown local support for the proposed speed limit reductions in Theale. As such, it is recommended that the speed limit order is implemented as advertised in the consultation.

8.2 The following issues have been identified, which should be noted in respect of the implementation and monitoring of this pilot project and any subsequent projects:

- (a) Post-implementation monitoring of vehicle speeds is required to gauge compliance with new speed limits.
- (b) Thames Valley Police have made it clear that no additional enforcement for newly lowered speed limits will be carried out over and above their current routine activity.
- (c) Speed limits should be “self-enforcing” and where vehicle speeds are not within an acceptable margin of the speed limit, further measures may be required to promote compliance, which would in turn require additional funding. Alternatively,

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speed limits which do not achieve sufficient compliance may need to be reconsidered.

- (d) Further work may be required in subsequent projects to obtain greater engagement in the consultation process from residents, in order to be able to demonstrate local support for speed limit reductions.

- 8.3 Appendix A – Statutory consultation document
- 8.4 Appendix B – Plan showing existing speed limits in Theale
- 8.5 Appendix C – Plan showing proposed speed limits in Theale
- 8.6 Appendix D – Summary of consultation responses

Background Papers:

[Executive Report EX4435 - Response to Council Motion on 20mph Speed Limits \(November 2023\)](#)

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No:

- The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval
- Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council
- Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position
- Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees or Task Groups within preceding six months
- Item is Urgent Key Decision
- Report is to note only

Wards affected: Theale ward is directly affected, but as a pilot project all wards are potentially affected in the longer term as the experience here will shape the future implementation of 20mph speed limits across the district.

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