

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE
TUESDAY 20 MARCH 2001 AT 10.30AM**

30MPH SPEED LIMITS IN VILLAGES

Report of the Director of Environment

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1. Purpose of the report

1.1 In the light of new research, to reconsider the policy of implementing blanket 30mph speed limits in villages, with respect to locations where existing road layouts encourage speeds to be excessively high, and where the introduction of a 'first stage' 40mph limit, (with supporting speed reduction measures where necessary), would be more appropriate.

2. Summary

2.1 The policy agreed by members in October 1999 revised the criteria for providing 30mph speed limits in areas where people live, requiring consideration of a 30mph limit in villages or hamlets with 10 or more dwellings in close proximity. The aim was to improve the quality of life of people affected by roads with current national (60mph) speed limits.

2.2 In March 2000 DETR published a review of Speed Management Policy. Research indicates that accidents increase where vehicle speeds along sections of road widely differ. Ideally, vehicles should travel at or near the desired speed in order to avoid bunching, and speed limits should be appropriate for the character of a road and its environment.

2.3 During the consultation process to implement the new proposals, concern has been raised that at several sites current speeds are high. The current speeds are such that without extensive traffic calming work, the desired 30mph limit will not be achieved and drivers who continue to maintain high speeds will 'bunch' with drivers complying with the new limit, thereby increasing the risk of accidents. A list of sites currently identified is attached as Appendix A.

- 2.4 Government research shows that drivers will not readily comply with speed limits which they feel are too low for the circumstances, unless there are measures which encourage them to reduce speeds.
- 2.5 In these cases, implementation of an appropriately supported 40mph limit in the first instance could offer an opportunity to create a culture of reduced driving speeds whilst maintaining limits more appropriate for the nature of the road, without an automatic need for engineering measures. Various measures such as interactive message signs to encourage reduced speed would be employed with actual speeds being regularly reviewed, and if at a later date monitoring shows that speeds have dropped sufficiently, then a further reduction to 30mph would be considered. The Roads Policing Department has indicated that they would be willing to enforce key sites with appropriate 40mph limits, which they would not support if they were subject to 30mph limits.

3 Background

- 3.1 The current policy addresses 'quality of life' issues for people in rural areas affected by roads currently unprotected by a 30 or 40mph speed limit. In some areas however, the introduction of a 30mph limit without additional speed reducing measures might result in increased accidents due to a wide range of vehicle speeds along the route.
- 3.2 Members are asked to consider an amended approach for these limited number of sites, which would allow provision of 40mph speed limits, with supporting speed reduction measures where appropriate, to improve the quality of life of locally affected people, but which would not result in such variances of speed.
- 3.3 Where monitoring of vehicle speeds at those sites indicated a sufficient drop in speed, a further reduction to 30mph would be considered at a future date.
- 3.4 Sites where traffic calming or other supporting measures would be required to ensure that speeds were brought down to a reasonable level would need to be dealt with appropriately on a site by site basis.
- 3.5 In March 2000 DETR published 'New Directions in Speed Management', a review of national policy. In it they recommend 'working towards 30mph being the norm for villages', but accept that it will be difficult to persuade drivers to reduce their speeds through education and publicity if the public perception is that the speed limit is too low.
- 3.6 Hertfordshire Constabulary has responded to published Traffic Regulation Orders for some of the sites proposed under the new policy, indicating that the Roads Policing Department opposed some of the proposals on the grounds that an increase in road accidents could occur if 'bunching' of traffic resulted from implementation of 30mph limits in areas where the current speeds are high.
- 3.7 Officers share these concerns. In some cases extensive traffic calming work, or camera installation (at recognised accident sites only), would be needed to ensure that speeds could successfully be reduced to 30mph. However at some sites, an introductory 40mph limit, supported by appropriate measures, could help to reduce current speeds

sufficiently to allow consideration for a further reduction to be considered at a future date. In addition, the Roads Policing Department has indicated that they would be willing to join with us in a targeted strategy to enforce new 40mph limits whereas they would not consider enforcing these sites set at a 30mph level, believing it to be unreasonably low.

- 3.8 An amended policy would enable consideration to be given to installing supported 40mph limits without a need for extensive traffic calming work, where officers felt them to be more appropriate, both in terms of ensuring that increased accidents are avoided, and as a standard response to Police objections to 30mph limits, where officers consider the objection to be reasonable. In all other cases it is suggested that the Highway Authority rigorously pursues the new policy.
- 3.9 At sites where extensive traffic calming would be required to achieve reduced speed levels, appropriate measures would be considered on a site by site basis.

4 Financial Implications

- 4.1 To provide traffic calming measures at sites which may not be immediately suitable for 30mph limits without engineering measures, could cost in the order of £250,000, for which there is currently no allocated budget. However, implementation of supported 40mph limits where appropriate can be met from existing budgets. Future reductions from 40 to 30mph where appropriate will require publication of further TROs and new signs.

5 Conclusion

- 5.1 The policy to implement 30mph limits in villages was introduced as a measure to improve quality of life for people affected by roads with a national 60mph speed limit. Current research has shown that in some circumstances introducing 30mph limits without accompanying traffic calming measures could result in increases in accidents due to widely varying speeds along the length of the route.
- 5.2 An alternative approach would be to implement a supported 40mph speed limit as a first stage measure, that would improve the quality of life of locally affected people but would not result in such variances of speed.
- 5.3 An amendment to the existing policy would give officers a standard method of dealing with Police objections where there is an agreed risk of increased accidents.
- 5.4 Sites where extensive traffic calming would be required to ensure that speeds were brought down to a reasonable level would need to be dealt with appropriately, on a site by site basis.

Documents used in preparation of the report:

DETR – New Directions in Speed Management - a review of policy. March 2000
Environment Committee – Review of Speed Policy 12 October 1999

APPENDIX A

List of Sites with 85th Percentile Speeds in excess of 50mph currently identified which could be considered for the introduction of an appropriately supported 40mph speed limit:

B656 Langley in North Hertfordshire
A1170 Near Amwell Roundabout in East Hertfordshire
Annables/ Kingsbourne Green in St Albans (part of)
Harper Lane in St Albans Area
Lye Lane/ Smug Oak Lane in St Albans.

Further consultation processes may identify additional sites.