

# ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

## SPEED LIMIT TASK GROUP FINAL REPORT

### Chairman's Introduction

As a 'new' (elected June 2009) back bench member of Gloucestershire County Council I like most members have found that one of the most pressing issues raised by parishes and others in my division (North Stroud) is traffic speeds in the communities. Many want action taken to reduce a speed limit; to install traffic calming measures; and for road crossings – in particular by schools.

On trying to take their requests further I learnt that the perception of many of parishes was that, although polite and apparently willing to listen, Gloucestershire Highways (GH) usually found ways of not implementing the requested action. When I was put on the Environment Scrutiny Committee I found that councillors of all parties experienced this 'us' and 'them' (them being the County) attitude among our 'constituents', and elected members felt that this would not do.

It was also difficult to understand the lack of weight given in the guidelines to the social cost in some traffic blighted towns and villages. There must be something wrong with the agencies of the council or the system underlying the malaise. For my own part it seemed incredible that a community in my division with a primary school on a busy road (Whiteshill) where the headteacher, the local parish council, the district councillor, the County Councillor, the Ex-M.P, and current M.P, and 355 petitioners all want a speed limit reduction to 20 mph and proper crossing could be denied action on requests going back several years.

Separate from that wish by councillors to look into the setting of speed limits, there was a request by the county's only Green Party Councillor, Sarah Lunnon, to consider the improved safety and wellbeing of communities where 20 mph blanket speed zones had been introduced and asking for them in Gloucestershire. It is refreshing that we have her positive 'green' enthusiasm and informed views on traffic.etc which substantially contributed to our study.

From these beginnings we assessed the evidence from within the county and outside, in particular 20 mph schemes in Portsmouth, Warrington and elsewhere. We are particularly grateful to Inspector Fagan of Gloucestershire Police and to Elin Tattersall of the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) and Mr John Mallows of the '20's plenty for us' group for their time in attending our meetings and answering questions. I would also like to thank them for their presentations and Elin Tattersall for collating evidence from the parish councils on our behalf. We are also grateful to the parish and town groups and individuals who made submissions to us and whose views we have taken into account in this study.

I also thank the officers from GH and the Road Safety Partnership, especially Martin Midgeley and Scott Tompkins of the former, and Sheila Corkett and Andrew Parker-Mowbray of the latter for their valuable input, Thank you from me to the members of the task group, Cllrs John Cordwell, Chris Pallet, Terry Glastonbury, Terry Hale, Sarah Lunnon, Martin Quaile and Brian Robinson; and, most of all to Andrea Clarke our efficient and indefatigable scrutiny adviser to the group.

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I think that if the Cabinet accept our recommendations Gloucestershire will have a more consumer friendly system of traffic management, and will be in the forefront of councils like Portsmouth and Warrington which are leading the way into making the twenty-first century a less car and lorry dominated, carbon wasteful society; and we will have taken the first steps towards safer healthier and happier communities throughout Gloucestershire. All this at less real cost (and probably at less cash cost-read what we suggest) than the current unpopular multi agency process.

I am honoured to present this report and these recommendations to the Cabinet on behalf of the task group.

**Cllr Tony Blackburn**

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## 1. Background

1.1 The task group was commissioned following the debate on road safety at the meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14 July 2010. The item included the draft guidelines on 20mph zones and it became clear that there was strong feeling around the table that members did not feel that this council was responding appropriately to our local communities' requests for these type of zones. Coupled with this was a request from Cllr Sarah Lunnon for a task group to look at this matter. The task group was duly commissioned by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and started its work in September 2010. (For information the task group's one page strategy is attached at Annex A).

1.2 At the outset of this work the task group felt strongly that we should meet with parish councils and members of the public. However officers were equally concerned that we would be in danger of raising expectations that at the end of this work the council would be in the position of delivering on parish council requests. Having reluctantly agreed to officers concerns we have however been able to gain an understanding of people's views on this issue by: -

- ⇒ Meeting with a representative from the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) who, whilst not speaking for parish councils, was able to represent their views
- ⇒ Receiving answers to our questions from parish councils (via GRCC)
- ⇒ Asking those areas, in Gloucestershire, where 20mph zones are in place for their views on the success or not of these schemes
- ⇒ Meeting with a member of the 20s plenty for us group
- ⇒ Receiving the data from the LTP3 consultation relating to road safety (which included a specific question on 20mph zones)
- ⇒ Meeting with the Police
- ⇒ Consultation with road safety liaison group members
- ⇒ Input from GH Stakeholder Manager relating to previous parish and community requests for 20mph zones (Annex B).

1.3 Our considerations also included: -

- ⇒ Department for Transport (DfT) circulars 01/06 and (9/99)
- ⇒ The Interim Evaluation of the Implementation of 20mph Speed Limits in Portsmouth (September 2010)
- ⇒ The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) 'Streets ahead: safe and liveable streets for children' (2002) specifically the section on the evaluation of 20mph zones in Kingston upon Hull
- ⇒ The Cabinet report of Warrington Council regarding the implementation of blanket 20mph limits
- ⇒ GCC Road Safety Partnership information
- ⇒ Research materials available at the 20s Plenty for Us website
- ⇒ The British Medical Journal article - Reducing the speed limit to 20 mph in urban areas (29 April 2000)

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1.4 Portsmouth City Council kindly agreed to answer our questions, and the task group is grateful for their support.

## 2. Meeting the Challenge (The Financial Context)

2.1 When the task group began its work it was within the framework of a limited amount of capital funding available for improvement schemes and we were looking at how we could help match this finite resource with the needs of our local communities. Once the Meeting the Challenge (MTC) report was published the picture altered dramatically to one of no funding for improvement schemes. This made, what was an already difficult task, even more challenging.

2.2 There is a clear dilemma here. As councillors we know from our divisional work that speed related issues are a significant concern for many people; we know from speaking with Gloucestershire Highways (GH) officers that they receive a high volume of requests from parish and town councils relating to speed issues; we know from our meeting with GRCC that 98% of parish plans contain an action relating to roads and traffic; we know from the draft corporate strategy that this council wants to support our local communities; but, without funding for improvement schemes how can we meet our community's needs and expectations?

2.3 Therefore a significant question for the task group and this council is how can we help our communities address and manage their concerns with regard to traffic speed when there is no available funding from the council to help them?

2.4 Our study reveals that 20mph zones may save costs on traffic management devices and that parish and town councils may be prepared to fund their own 20mph sign and even to contribute towards the legal costs of setting up a 20mph scheme.

2.5 The Meeting the challenge strategy for Highways states that the aim is to 'explore more innovative and flexible ways of dealing with community concerns around speed.' And that community self help will become ever more important (p40). The task group feel that its recommendations can reconcile reduced central funding with these objectives.

## 3. What did we learn?

### 3.1 The Present System

3.1.1 The task group agreed that there appears to be a lack of understanding from both the public and councillors as to the roles of the various council bodies involved in the management of our highways. We have GH, the Road Safety Partnership, and Road Safety Liaison Groups. The task group feel that the role of each of these bodies should be clarified to enable a better understanding of what they are there to do.

3.1.2 There is also a lack of understanding as to why the only statistic used for improvement schemes within the current system is the Killed and Seriously Injured (KSI) performance data, which is a much more reactive driver, focusing on the cure rather than prevention. The task group do of course acknowledge that this data does have a role to play in identifying where there may be hotspots that may need attention in terms of road safety. However it should be considered within the wider context of the community's view and fails to take into account the health safety and well being of that community.

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## 3.2 The Speed Limit: 20 mph

3.2.1 In simple terms speed kills. Speed also makes people feel unsafe in their community. Roads have for many people become hostile traffic corridors dividing their community. Introducing reduced speed limits can therefore not only be a way to reduce accidents, but also to start to bring the community together again – enabling people to walk and cycle more, and enjoy their local area more.

3.2.2 Blanket 20mph zones have been implemented in some local authorities across the country – Portsmouth is perhaps the most well known. The 20s Plenty for Us lobby group feel that the momentum for this type of approach to traffic calming is growing. The DfT interim report on the Portsmouth scheme indicates that the scheme is well received by the residents and has been associated with reductions in road casualty numbers.

3.2.3 During the course of its work the task group asked for a list of those areas which had 20mph limits in place, and those where one had been requested. Members were disappointed that we were unable to receive a definitive list, and feel that the council should have a register of this type of information.

3.2.4 The information that we received from parish councils (via GRCC) was clear that there is a strong desire across many parishes for a speed limit reduction, although not all wanted traffic calming measures such as road humps, chicanes etc to be installed in their community. It would, of course, be unwise, to assume that there is a universal desire for 20mph zones or speed limits across the population of Gloucestershire. The LTP3 consultation data shows that although 66.7% of respondents supported the introduction of 20mph zones, the combined score of those undecided and those opposed was 29.8%. The message from those areas where 20mph zones have been implemented was mixed, with not all schemes being viewed as a success.

3.2.5 Of the 13 responses to the Road Safety Liaison Group's questionnaire, 8 were for 20mph control, 2 for 20mph by schools and 3 against one on the grounds of enforcement. Of the 29 submissions to the GRCC, 23 were for 20mph controls, 3 wanted better enforcement of an existing limit and 6 were against, 1 wanted traffic calming features installed as part of a 20mph scheme removed. Many still wanted 20 mph limits by schools. (Details of the parishes and others making submissions are set out in Annex C). For some parishes the solution was simply for the police to enforce the current speed limits.

3.2.6 The task group were informed that GH are in the process of implementing a 20mph zone in Stonehouse, taking an innovative shared space approach. This scheme also draws on funding from section 106 funding. The scheme has taken a long time to come to fruition, which has been frustrating for residents but it is anticipated that it will make a significant change in the way that local people can use this space.

3.2.7 A very strong message coming from the parish councils is that GH is seen as a barrier, with officers consistently managing down expectations or saying no to schemes. Parish councils feel very frustrated by this. We were assured by GH that they are supportive of 20mph speed limits and zones, but are conscious of limited resources and do not wish to raise expectations.

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3.2.8 The task group agreed that there appears to be a lack of understanding from both the public and councillors as to the roles of the various council bodies involved in the management of our highways. We have GH, the Road Safety Partnership, and Road Safety Liaison Groups. The task group feel that the role of each of these bodies should be clarified to enable a better understanding of what they are there to do.

3.2.9 We were informed by the Police representative that sometimes speed related issues can be a perception issue, with cars not actually going at the speed that people think they are. We were informed that by the police engaging with the community and exploring what speed drivers are reaching many issues can be overcome. That being said we also think that if speed is an issue for the community, whether drivers are keeping to the speed limit, or not, we should give preference to their concerns.

3.2.10 It is also important to note that when looking at 20mph zones they should be self enforcing. It is not that the Police will not enforce these speed limits but rather that a scheme is only successful when it does not need this type of engagement. The Hampshire Constabulary were clear in their response to Portsmouth Council that, whilst not objecting to the planned implementation of 20mph zones, they would not enforce them. Subsequent to the implementation they have worked with the council in terms of educating drivers and advising on where additional design engineering should be installed to support the zones being self enforcing. The community and the Police appear to regard the blanket 20 mph zone as a success.

3.2.11 The Portsmouth scheme shows that savings can be made when implementing blanket 20mph schemes. If an area is one where the local geography already slows traffic down significant design engineering may not be necessary and signage and road roundels may be all that is required. The task group agree that that there are localities across Gloucestershire that fit this profile and could be considered for 20mph limits without incurring too much expense for the council.

### **4. How can we help our communities?**

#### **4.1 Enabling agenda**

4.1.1 Whilst aware of the current economic climate parish and town councils will still no doubt feel very frustrated that their concerns regarding excessive speed are not being addressed. The task group agreed that, subject to its recommendations, this council was still in a position to support our communities with these issues. We may not be able to fund schemes, but rather than continue to be seen as a barrier and saying no, the council needs to think about what we can do, and how we can enable communities. Members of the task group feel strongly that the focus should be on responding to the needs of the community rather than imposing the council's view on them.

4.1.2 Some parish/town councils may decide that they wish to self finance schemes. If this is so it will be important that they fully understand the steps involved in planning a scheme. A simple price list outlining the different types of engineering and signage, and the cost of a traffic regulation order may help focus their aspirations. A process map (or scheme pack) could be developed demonstrating: -

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- ⇒ What DfT guidelines need to be considered when thinking about implementing a 20mph zone/limit,
- ⇒ What are the costs of the different types of engineering,
- ⇒ How does the TRO system work,
- ⇒ Are there any bodies that they could approach for additional funding,
- ⇒ How to access/engage with the allocation of section 106 funding
- ⇒ Whether they should give consideration to using their precept to 'buy' a scheme,
- ⇒ Given that there is not a universal wish for 20mph zones/limits how parish and town councils consult residents will be key and we could offer advice on this aspect,

This could enable the local community to put together and initiate a case for consideration by GCC.

4.1.3 A suggestion from one of the parish councils was that speed limits should be an integral part of the consideration of any planning proposals for new housing developments. The Localism Bill is about local people having a greater say about what happens in their community with regard to planning and housing developments. The task group feels that there is a role here for this council to ensure that our communities are aware of this agenda and how they can maximise its potential to the greater benefit of the community.

### 4.2 Prevention agenda

4.2.1 There is clearly a role for the council and its partners with regard to the prevention agenda. The Road Safety Partnership already leads on community speed campaigns and as a council we can ensure that local communities are aware that they have this option available to them. These speeding campaigns have already proved effective in encouraging drivers to modify their behaviour and help them understand that poor driving is not acceptable.

4.2.2 Speed campaigns could be the precursor to a parish or town council putting forward a case for a reduced speed limit in their area. There is also a potential role for advisory limits which could help identify whether a parish or town council would need to consider traffic calming measures as well as signage. If it is demonstrated that there is a clear need for a reduced speed limit then the parish council may consider that an advisory limit is only a temporary measure and that a permanent solution is the best use of their resources. However, the task group heard that there have been cases where parishes were allowed to invest in, and erected, GH approved '20's plenty for us' advisory signs only to be told by GH to remove them later. The task group suggest that any advice given to communities is clear from the outset so that they can make a considered and informed decision as to how best to use their limited resources, and do not retrospectively find themselves in this position.

4.2.3 The Police Inspector we met also emphasised that SARA plans (this is a problem solving methodology developed by the Police - Scan Analyse Respond Assess) are now owned by the community in partnership with the Police (rather than owned by the Police as previously) and speeding issues can be addressed through this route.

4.2.4 The local press has reported on school children getting involved in raising awareness in the vicinity of their school. The task group agree that engaging with children and young people is a positive approach. Exploring the risks of speeding and the impact that it can have on a community could motivate them to take the message out to their wider family and

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friends group. As a council we need to see how we can encourage schools and colleges to promote the road safety agenda.

## 4.3 Health agenda

4.3.1 It is evident from the Portsmouth , Warrington and Hull studies that 20mph zones lead to a healthier and safer community. People cycle or walk to work, and children to and from school. Shopping is easier, with shopping and residential areas no longer divided by traffic or blighted by excessive traffic noise and pollution.

4.3.2 The task group hope that its recommendations could give Gloucestershire the additional bonus that its communities feel safer and more able to use their community space. It should be noted that people in Portsmouth originally against the 20mph blanket zone came to accept and indeed approve of its benefits after implementation.

4.3.3 It is also a finding from these studies that a speed limit reduction to 20mph brings down carbon emissions and fuel consumption and is thereby likely to improve Gloucestershire's carbon footprint and have advantages for the environment.

4.3.4 20 mph limits and zones can therefore support the aims of the council and its partners as described in the Sustainable Community Strategy (2007 – 2017), for example – a place where community matters.

4.3.5 There could be the additional bonus that if communities feel safer and more able to use their community space to walk or cycle this could make people healthier and potentially help address the agenda to reduce obesity.

## 5. Prioritisation

5.1 If we are to support our communities in this way and schemes come forward as a result of parishes deciding to self finance, or if money is available through a section 106, there remains the issue of how to prioritise. The council's resources are limited and so must be effectively managed.

5.2 Whilst wanting to help our communities develop their environment and make it a safer place to live, and work, the council must also be mindful of the overall effect across the road network of different speed limits. The council should therefore retain its central role in setting speed limits such that the roads have consistent speed limits and do not change randomly, but makes sense to the driver, and encourages drivers to see that the speed limit reflects the environment through which they are driving.

5.3 The task group recognise that KSI data remain the most important factor in prioritising schemes. However the task group suggest that in assessing any scheme the wider impacts of speed on the local community should be taken into account, and the wish for a safer and more cohesive community should be given due weight in any such assessment.

## 6. Conclusion

Given everything that it has heard and read, the task group recommends that the Cabinet support the implementation of 20mph limits/zones across the county. Members of the task

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group appreciate the difficult financial climate that this council is in and has therefore put forward recommendations that incur minimal cost. However, whatever the financial climate the task group must emphasise the importance of putting the needs of the local community at the forefront of any consideration of requests for speed limit reductions. As a community leader the council is tasked with promoting the health and well being of residents, and 20mph limits and zones can have significant benefits with regard to community cohesion.

The task group would appreciate a written response to its report and recommendations by 30 April 2011.

### **7. Recommendations**

- 1. Subject to capital funding being available the task group recommend that the Cabinet develop a programme of work to roll out blanket 20mph limits and zones across the county. The task group recommends that the Cabinet follows the DfT document 'A Safer Way' and introduce these zones or limits throughout Gloucestershire into 'streets that are primarily residential in nature, or other areas where pedestrian and cyclist movements are high (for example around schools, homes for the elderly or markets), but are not part of any major through route (except where the local community demonstrates that it is vital to include it).**
- 2. The task group recommends that the Cabinet redraft the 20mph (draft) guidance so that it includes a measure of community perceptions, and how a 20mph limit can enable more walking and cycling as well as the general 'safer' perceptions of residents.**
- 3. The task group recommends that the Cabinet should be proactive in helping local communities initiate speed reduction schemes in their areas.**
- 4. The task group recommends that Cabinet put in place a clear process to support local communities initiate the case for a reduced speed limit in their area. The process could be in the form of a self assessment tool to help communities identify whether there is sufficient need for a reduction in the speed limit in their area, and how to take this forward.**
- 5. The task group recommends that the Cabinet develop a price list outlining the costs involved in implementing a speed limit reduction. The price list should be clear on the different types of engineering that may be required, and also include the costs of the traffic regulation order. The price list will enable the local community to decide whether they can afford to implement a scheme themselves or take another approach.**
- 6. The task group recommends that Cabinet helps parish and town councils to be clear as to how they can access and participate in the allocation of any available section 106 funding for speed control and traffic calming measures in their areas.**
- 7. The task group recommends that Cabinet consider whether it can help local communities ascertain funding for improvement schemes by raising their own funds through precept, sponsorship from the private sector, or in other ways.**

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8. The task group recommends that Cabinet consider how advisory speed limits can be used to help parish and town councils address speeding concerns and should help rather than discourage experimental schemes.

9. In order that the roles of the different bodies involved in the management of the road network and road safety matters in Gloucestershire is clear. The task group recommends that the Cabinet undertake a review of the councils web pages to ensure that information is up to date, and that there are clear signposts for members of the public, councillors, parish and town councils as to where they can find information and who to contact for help with regard to road safety, and speed related matters. It is important that the information makes it clear that GCC as the highway authority is responsible for setting all speed limits in the county.

10. The task group recommends that the Cabinet maintain an available record so that it is clear where the county has 20mph limits in place, and where the council has received a request to implement a scheme and the ongoing status of these requests. A clear list will enable the council to have a better understanding of the volume of outstanding requests, and help the council to plan how it can help these communities.

### **ANNEXES**

**Annex A - The one page strategy**

**Annex B - List of current speed limit requests**

**Annex C - List of parishes and others making submissions**