

Traffic & Road Safety 7

Guiden Morden village enjoys a distinct advantage in not being on the way to particularly anywhere. Thus it does not suffer from significant through traffic in the way that, say, Kneesworth does, nor does it experience heavy lorries in the same way as, say, Gamlingay. In fact, a number of respondents specifically referred to the relatively low traffic volumes as a positive feature of the village and in making the village a safer place for children. With 94% of Appraisal respondents confirming that they drive a car regularly in or around the village, and with patterns of local car ownership showing a steady uptrend, it is clear that a high proportion of road users in the village are local, whether resident in Guiden Morden or in the surrounding villages; the principal traffics are private cars (by far), tradesmen's vans, occasional buses and large farm vehicles, the latter most noticeably in the harvest season. Even so, there are lengthy periods during most days and, of course, at night, when the village roads are silent.

These observations are relevant when considering the principal concerns among local residents regarding traffic in the village and the associated question of road safety.

Speed

Among those who referred to traffic issues in their Appraisal responses, by far the majority expressed concern about vehicle speeds within the village limits, most particularly on the approach roads to the village and in New Road. In fact, at least one respondent sought an end to further local road improvements in order not to encourage motorists to drive faster! At present, approaching traffic from Shingay along New Road is required to reduce to 40mph and then to 30mph, while on all other village approaches the requirement is to reduce to 30mph immediately. All these signs are reinforced by red colour warning patches on the road surface and the word "SLOW". The only other forms of speed limitation within the village comprise small 'reminder' signs at the roadside reinforcing the 30mph limit.

Addressing the problem of vehicle speed, the Appraisal invited respondents to suggest what additional measures (if any) they would support to achieve more effective control. Opinion was almost equally divided for and against 'active' measures like speed bumps ("sleeping policemen") and chicanes designed physically to oblige the driver to slow down. Looking at Gamlingay, where no less than 14 individual 'bumps' face drivers travelling north/south through the village, there is no doubt that, while certainly effective in keeping speeds low, vehicles which negotiate the trail regularly do suffer in terms of damage to suspension, tracking, etc. Chicanes are rather less damaging yet do force approaching drivers to reduce speed, but, if located only at the approaches to the village, are effective only at those points and drivers tend to increase their speed within the village if no additional reinforcing measures are applied. Perhaps least effective are 'rumble strips' (eg. on the approach to Ashwell from Newnham) and similar de-

Here's how you prioritised traffic and road safety problems in our village:

63 respondents highlighted 'Speeding' as the key issue. Particular problem areas included -

- New Road - 20 references
- Trap Road/Fox Hill Road - 14 references
- Ashwell Road/High Street - 9 references
- Pound Green/Dubs Knoll Road - 7 references
- Church Street - 4 references

32 people referred to children playing unsupervised in New Road.

Lack of proper roadside footpaths at certain points concerned 9 people.

How you voted on new speed control measures -

- more 'active' measures like speed bumps and chicanes - 107 in favour / 110 against
- more 'passive' measures like signs and road markings - 162 in favour / 49 against
- rigorous enforcement of the existing 30mph speed limit - 180 in favour / 44 against

In terms of "accidents waiting to happen", the following locations are seen as potential disaster areas -

- the 'S' bend between Ashwell Road and High Street
- the blind junction between Silver Street and High Street
- poor visibility of approaching traffic at Church Street/High Street junction
- lack of warning/priority signs at narrow Hooks Mill bridge.

Other significant road safety concerns include -

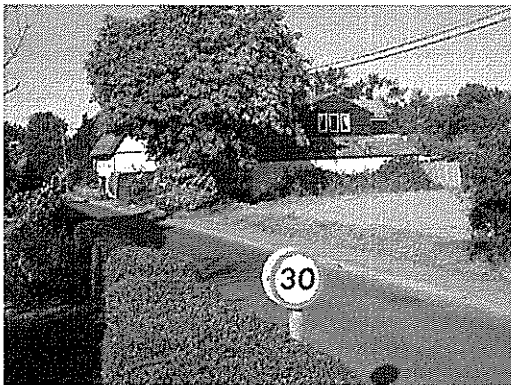
- indiscriminate parking of cars on pavements and verges.
- illegal parking of cars outside the Edward VII pub, opposite an important road junction.
- roadside car parking in Church Street
- car parking outside the School, particularly at afternoon 'pick-up' time.

vices, which act as little more than 'attention grabbers' where mandatory warning signs are exhibited at the roadside. The Appraisal Group feels that a case might be made for properly signed chicanes on three of the four approaches to the village - in Ashwell

Road, in Trap Road and in New Road (there is no requirement in Potton Road owing to the existing hazard of the tight bend) – linked to the existing 30mph restriction signs at entrances to the village which could be made more prominent.

A far stronger majority – 162 respondents in favour and only 49 against – favoured 'passive' measures like more road signs and markings, yet these are the least effective in persuading motorists to control speed. A rather stronger 'passive' measure to which the Appraisal Group is attracted are the automatic radar-activated speed warning displays that now exist in such villages as Arrington, Longstowe, Meldreth, Harston and also in Royston. While not forcing motorists to slow down, they have more immediate impact than a traditional fixed sign and are thus effective in drawing attention to the presence of a speed restriction. A few motorists may even be persuaded that a speed camera exists!

An overwhelming majority of Appraisal respondents supported more rigorous enforcement of existing speed limits within the village. And there is no doubt that the motorist is most likely to slow down when either his car or his pocket (or both) are in danger. Thus, while speed bumps are effective as they threaten damage to the car if approached at too high a speed, speed cameras are most effective of all, being backed with the likelihood of a substantial fine and licence endorsement.



It says 30 mph—but how many drivers obey it?

The Appraisal Group is aware that, on cost grounds alone, there is no prospect of having permanent speed cameras erected in Guiden Morden. However, the Group is equally aware that Police can mount periodic unannounced roadside 'radar traps' as a means of keeping motorists 'on their toes' and justifying permanent signs on village approaches announcing "Police Cameras" or "Safety Cameras" – as at Wrestlingworth. This uncertainty can have a useful calming effect on regular motorists, to whom permanent warning signs of any kind (including warnings of Cameras where locals know that there are no such things) quickly become familiar and are disregarded.

The Group would also like to suggest consideration of deliberate 'narrowing' of both High Street and Fox Hill Road in an environmentally and aesthetically sensitive manner, as a means of forcing drivers to reduce their speed. This might even have the spinoff advantage of creating space for safer path-

ways for pedestrians and of providing opportunity for sympathetic landscaping and environmental upgrading.

Considerably less appealing in the context of speed control measures is the concept floated during 2002 in the local press – allegedly with official Police endorsement – of training local residents in the use of handheld radar cameras and setting them loose to spy on their neighbours. Such a course would, in the opinion of the Group, give rise to animosity and division within the village community, perhaps leading to violence, and we therefore strongly recommend against its adoption.

As a related comment, we applaud the linking of speed cameras with written warnings – rather than automatic fines – being sent to those who transgress, at least on the first offence. We feel that this is useful in reinforcing the concept that the cameras truly exist to reduce speed and improve road safety, and are not merely a convenient means of raising revenue.

Opinion was almost equally divided among Appraisal respondents on whether the overall speed limit within the village should be reduced from 30mph to 20mph. The rationale behind this question was that most motorists do tend to drive at slightly above the required speed limit – thus 30mph translates in practice as 35 or even 40mph. A general speed limit of 20mph (or 19mph as in the new Cambourne village!) might result in speeds of around 25-30mph. Particularly surprising to the Group was that only one person suggested imposing a 20mph speed limit in the vicinity of the School.

Accidents Waiting to Happen

Consideration of speeding naturally leads to the wider issue of road safety in the village generally and of particular accident danger-spots. Top of the hit list with 48 specific mentions by respondents is the 'S' bend at the south end of the village where Ashwell Road translates into High Street. Problems here are seen as a combination of speed, narrow road width (occasionally exacerbated by inconsiderate resident car parking), lack of road markings and a common tendency on the part of motorists to 'cut' the corner in both directions. There have already been a number of 'near misses' and it is widely regarded as an accident waiting to happen. The Appraisal Group consider this to be a priority for action, and suggest improvement by –

- straightening the bend slightly (there is a wide verge at the High Street end) and widening both carriageways as far as possible
- installing improved warning signs, emphasising particularly the need to stay in lane and not cut the corner
- putting in more positive road markings highlighting the danger and giving stronger emphasis to the centreline between the carriageways
- installing a chicane in Ashwell Road with appropriate signing, designed to give priority to traffic leaving the village.

A second danger spot is seen as the junction between Silver Street and High Street, where cars emerging from Silver Street have virtually no view of traffic approaching on the down-gradient (and often at speed in consequence) along High Street. Ingenious solutions have been suggested, including either a mini-roundabout at this junction, or a combination of mini-

roundabouts and a one-way traffic flow between Silver Street and Church Street. The Appraisal Group has some support for the former, but is prevented from giving a firm recommendation owing to the proliferation of associated roadside signs that would inevitably result – with the attendant adverse visual impact on an especially environmentally sensitive area of the village. We are also not convinced that a mini-roundabout would actually address the problem of visibility; vehicles approaching down High Street would still threaten those wishing to emerge from Silver Street and might be encouraged still further to assume that they have right-of-way over traffic joining from the left. Perhaps the only environmentally acceptable solution is to install 'rumble strips' in High Street on the approach side of the junction, in an effort to attract drivers' attention to the hazard.

In a different vein, many respondents referred to the problem of children playing unsupervised in New Road (and sometimes in Trap Road). The Appraisal Group deprecates the irresponsibility of parents who allow their offspring to play on a public highway where a problem of traffic speed is known to exist and where entirely safe play facilities on a proper Recreation Ground are but a few short steps away. There is also concern that the activities of these children extend beyond play and ball-games to throwing stones at passing cars and playing "chicken". The Parish Council has grappled unsuccessfully with this problem over an extended period and, in the opinion of the Appraisal Group, the time has come for more positive action by the appropriate authorities to enforce some form of control over the youngsters concerned.

OTHER ROAD SAFETY ISSUES

As the Group assessed the results from the Appraisal, we found many instances of important observations made by just one or two people. We believe these comments are worthy of note, even though they may not have the weight of opinion behind them.

Parking

Inconsiderate parking, particularly at the roadside, is clearly a valid concern. Certain respondents to the Appraisal rightly drew attention to the awkward—and probably illegal, in view of the road junction—parking of cars outside the Edward VII pub, which creates a hazard for vehicles driving up Fox Hill towards Trap Road. Not only is this a current problem, but we harbour concerns that, unless the practice is firmly controlled, it may escalate into a serious obstruction to traffic when the new Shop facility opens at the Pub and many more residents are tempted to park their cars "just for a minute".

The Group also supports calls for cars not to be parked on grass verges and we would welcome—on environmental grounds as well as for reasons of road safety—a solution to the issue of resident parking on the former verge in Fox Hill Road, which has created a muddy eyesore.

When considering traffic and safety issues generally in the village, there is a great temptation to impose

further restrictions either directly through the erection of roadside warning signs or by creating traffic calming measures that indirectly require the erection of additional street furniture. The Appraisal Group has balanced this issue against the strong desire on the part of many residents to preserve the character of the village and its visual environment. We do not see a proliferation of road signs and road markings to be conducive to this end. In fact, it is a feature worthy of note just how relatively few signs and road markings presently disfigure our village street scene; we have the advantage of having no 'yellow lines' at all! The Group feels that it is important to protect this visual asset, particularly in the Village Conservation Area. For a similar reason, the Group is reluctant to recommend further provision of paved footways within the village – other than in Dubs Knoll Road in the immediate vicinity of the School. Important characteristics of any village scene are unspoilt roadside verges and the lack of urbanising influences such as pathways and street lighting, and such features should therefore be applied only sparingly and with great care.



The corner of Trap Road/Church Street/Fox Hill Road—could this become a danger spot when the Shop opens?

As a final word in this Section, the Appraisal Group noted with slight amusement the references to "inconsiderate parking" by residents in Church Street creating "an obstruction" and "restricting visibility" for other motorists. It has apparently not impacted upon those critics that some Church Street residents (and High Street residents, too) deliberately place their cars in such a way as to create unofficial chicanes in an effort to force other road users to reduce their speed and to drive more carefully! The Appraisal Group would like to invite debate on whether Church Street should be distinctively paved at each end and converted into a pedestrian priority traffic-free zone with vehicular access for residents and churchgoers only.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- Speeding traffic in village streets is seen by many residents as a significant problem. However, the Appraisal Group notes that no road traffic accidents directly attributable to speed have occurred in the village over the past ten years.
- Traffic speeds could usefully be reduced on the approaches to the village, perhaps most effectively by the installation of chicanes. If further measures

are seen as necessary to reduce vehicle speeds within the village, the use of automatic radar-activated speed restriction displays are suggested, provided that they do not impact adversely upon the visual streetscape. Consideration should also be given to introducing locally-activated 20mph speed restriction signs in the immediate vicinity of the School.

- Periodic unannounced roadside 'radar traps' are an effective means of keeping motorists 'on their toes' and justify permanent warning signs on village approaches announcing "Police Cameras". However, the Appraisal Group does not support the training and use of volunteers from among local residents in mounting radar speed traps in the village.
- Consideration should be given to deliberate 'narrowing' of both High Street and Fox Hill Road in an environmentally and aesthetically sensitive manner, as a means of forcing drivers to reduce their speed.
- Effective control should be applied to the parking of vehicles outside the Edward VII pub, particularly when the new Shop facility opens.
- The 'S' bend at the transition between Ashwell Road and High Street is an accident waiting to happen that merits early attention. Children playing unsupervised in New Road also constitute a significant hazard to road users and a potential danger to

the individuals concerned. Positive action by the appropriate authorities is now required to enforce some form of control over the youngsters involved.

- The junction between Silver Street and High Street constitutes a hazard for vehicles turning out of Silver Street and the advice of professional Highway and Road Safety experts is required on how this problem might best be addressed.
- Further public debate is required among village residents as to –
 - the desirability of designating Church Street as a pedestrian priority traffic-free zone
 - the desirability of reducing the speed limit within the village generally to 20mph
- The Group supports calls for cars not to be parked on grass verges and would welcome a solution to the issue of resident parking on the former verge in Fox Hill Road, which has created a muddy eyesore.
- It is important that measures to reduce traffic speeds and to promote road safety within the village do not impact adversely upon the character of the village and the uncluttered aspect of the street scene, particularly within the Village Conservation Area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- We recommend that chicanes, with appropriate signs and maximum speed warnings, be installed on the approaches to the village in Trap Road, Ashwell Road and New Road.
- We recommend that local Police are encouraged to mount periodic unannounced roadside 'radar traps' on known sections of road within the village that are known to suffer from speeding, and that warning signs "Police Cameras" be erected on the four approaches to the village.
- We recommend that early action is taken to mitigate the danger to road users presently inherent in the 'S' bend at the junction of Ashwell Road and High Street, in the manner suggested in this Section.
- We recommend that positive action is now taken by the appropriate authorities to enforce some form of control over the children who play unsupervised in New Road, in order to eliminate this major safety hazard.
- We recommend that effective controls are applied to the parking of vehicles outside the Edward VII pub, particularly when the new Shop facility opens.
- We recommend that the advice of professional Highway and Road Safety experts is sought on possible solutions to the hazardous junction between Silver Street and High Street.
- We recommend that traffic priority warning signs are installed on the approaches to Hooks Mill bridge.
- We recommend that consideration be given to deliberate 'narrowing' of both High Street and Fox Hill Road in an environmentally and aesthetically sensitive manner, as a means of forcing drivers to reduce their speed.
- We suggest that further public debate takes place among village residents as to –
 - designating Church Street as a pedestrian priority traffic-free zone
 - introducing a locally-controlled 20mph speed restriction in the vicinity of the School at times when children are entering or leaving school
 - reducing the speed limit generally within the village to 20mph.