

Following our recent discussions on the subject of safety measures at A46/A4173 Pitchcombe junction the police were forwarded your report and associated documentation as agreed.

I have attached the reply received from Steve Norgate and as you will see he has provided a reasoned reply to argue against the introduction of a 40mph limit. I fully understand this will come as a disappointment to the members of the parish council and hope to offer you some comfort, by confirming that the third VAS and additional road markings have scored well in our priority assessment and will be included in next year's programme.

Please feel free to contact me if I can be of any further assistance in this matter.

regards
John Kay
Stakeholder Manager (Central)

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Safer Roads, Better Journeys

POLICE RESPONSE TO PCC REPORT

28-10-09



Gloucestershire Constabulary
Striving for a Safer Gloucestershire

Mr Glenn Dooley,
Forward Programme Team,
Asset Management,
Gloucestershire Highways,
Imperial Gate,
Corinium Avenue,
Barnwood,
Gloucester
GL4 3BW

Your Ref:

Our Ref: SN/ML 09-01

Ask For: Mr Steve Norgate

Direct Dial: 01242 247100

Date: 25 September 2009

GLOUCESTERSHIRE HIGHWAYS	
IMPERIAL GATE	
Exor Ref No:	523167
Date Received	30 SEP 2009
File Ref No:	
Responsibility of:	G Dooley
Priority	ACKS

Dear Glenn,

Re: Pitchcombe Parish Council – Request for reduction in speed limit on A46 & A4173

Thank you for your letter of 11th September enclosing the report from Pitchcombe Parish Council and the accompanying documents. As you have requested a reasoned response from the police I have prepared it in report format as follows.

Introduction

The difficulties and dangers experienced by drivers negotiating the junctions specified along the A46 and A4173 are real and have been recognised as a problem for many years. As traffic volumes have increased those difficulties and dangers have similarly increased so that the concerns raised by the Parish Council are completely understandable.

I am conscious of the determined efforts of Gloucestershire Highways to find an engineering solution to the main Pitchcombe junction in particular, having attended several site meetings myself. Unfortunately the completely effective solutions that we are all looking for have not been forthcoming for good practical reasons that I fully acknowledge.

One measure that was introduced some years ago was the reduction in the speed limit from the national limit to one of 50mph. This limit is being generally complied with on the main A roads as it corresponds to most drivers' assessment of what is a safe speed to travel. Unfortunately, travelling at such a speed does not make it safe for those trying to emerge from the side roads with very poor visibility.

In looking to improve this situation we must continue to apply the principle that speeds limits should not be set in isolation, but as part of a package with other measures to manage vehicle speeds.

Analysis of Data

Thank you for the accident statistics that you have supplied to me. They are clearly of critical importance in confirming the nature of the problems and cover the period from January 2005 to July 2009. As we might expect, clusters are evident around the junctions, notably at Pitchcombe and Pincot Lane. However, it is noticeable that similar clusters also exist at Edge village and on the approach to Stroud where lower speed limits were introduced in 2002 and 2003 respectively. It is regrettable that lower speed limits have not had the desired impact upon accidents at these locations and are clearly not the total solution.

The mean speeds of vehicles *approaching* the Pitchcombe junction along the A46/A4173 are all in the region of 44mph with an 85%ile of around 48mph, telling us that the limit is generally being complied with and that drivers see the limit to be appropriate. It is therefore self enforcing - as such limits should be wherever possible.

Coincidentally, I recently conducted a speed survey myself by Edge church in August of this year where mean speeds of 44mph and an 85%ile of 49mph were also recorded. This road is subject to a 40mph limit and despite this, motorists routinely ignore it. This reinforces the fact that lower speed limits on their own without supporting physical measures will not necessarily change driver behaviour and can result in substantial numbers of drivers continuing to travel at unacceptable speeds.

Application of DfT Circular 01/2006

The setting of speed limits is often a contentious issue, which is why the introduction of a DfT circular in 2006 was most welcome in helping to improve the understanding of why and how local speed limits are determined. It was good to see the document used in preparation of the Parish Council's case – a first in my experience. However, with respect to the author of the Parish paper, it quotes from the summaries of the Introduction and the Background sections of the circular but does not go on to apply several of the principles detailed later in other sections.

Key quotes from the circular that are particularly relevant to these circumstances, with any observations are:

'Concerns may also have been expressed by the local community' (Those concerns are fully evident in the case paper submitted and numerous letters of support that have been sent to me.)

'Effective speed management involves many components designed to work together to encourage, help and require road users to adopt appropriate and safe speeds....Speed limits should, therefore, be evidence-led, self-explaining and seek to reinforce people's assessment of what is a safe speed to travel.'

'Speed limits are only one element of speed management...Indeed, if a limit is set in isolation, or is unrealistically low, it is likely to be ineffective and lead to disrespect for the speed limit.'

'Speed limits should not be used to attempt to solve the problem of isolated hazards, such as a single road junction or reduced forward visibility such as a bend.' (I recognise that there is more than one junction but they are spaced over several miles of road.)

'Drivers are likely to expect and respect lower limits, and be influenced when deciding on what is an appropriate speed, where they can see there are potential hazards.'

'Mean speeds should be used as the basis for determining local speed limits..... The aim should be to align the local speed limit so that the original mean speed driven on the road is at or below the new posted speed limit for that road.' (The mean speeds recorded are currently too high for a 40mph limit and would need to be reduced by other measures.)

Conclusion

The dangers experienced by drivers emerging from the junctions specified have been well documented and are, I believe, fully understood by those working to find a solution. Our combined aim, working together, must be to find solutions to reduce those dangers and thereby to reduce accidents. However, it is my opinion that the blanket application of a 40mph speed limit that conflicts with DfT guidance is not, on its own, that solution.

I am bound to agree with your view that a lower limit would not result in much change to drivers' speeds. If reducing the number of accidents was as simple as reducing the limit on its own then it would have been done many years ago, unfortunately it isn't.

For these reasons, the Constabulary would be unable to support the proposed reduction if it were formally presented to us. That said, we remain committed to working with you and look forward to hopefully seeing some improvement following the installation of the third VAS and new road markings.

Yours sincerely



Steve Norgate
Road Safety & Traffic Management Officer