

Pitchcombe Parish Council
c/o Mill Orchard
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Stroud
GL6 6LN

Mr. Scott Tompkins
Lead Commissioner for Highways
Gloucestershire County Council
Shire Hall
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5th February 2016

Dear Mr Tompkins

Road Safety in Pitchcombe

The dangers of driving along the A46/A4173 in this Parish continue to be highlighted in the press (Stroud News & Journal, 9/12/15, and 20/1/16, both front page).

Sadly, one accident involved the death of a driver and our sympathies go out to her family and friends.

We do not know the exact circumstances of these accidents and if they could have been avoided, but it does focus our attention on the need to reduce accidents on these roads.

Some time ago, after years of discussion and analysis of the problem, Pitchcombe Parish Council came to the conclusion that there are two linked issues.

Firstly the main junction is dangerous and confusing due to its strange approach angles, acute changes in topography and a combination of conflicting traffic movements and difficult viewing angles for drivers. Some of the paths through it can be taken at high speeds, some paths require stopping or moving very slowly in the high speed lanes and others require traffic potentially moving at speed to briefly pause (not stop), before crossing other fast moving lanes.

The Council has reluctantly accepted that the ideal solution, a properly engineered roundabout, would be expensive and unlikely to find funding, but were surprised that the alternative, not cheap but probably fundable,

solution of traffic lights was rejected by Gloucestershire Highways as it might increase accidents.

However, the challenges to safety at the junction must be seen in the context that it is in a 50 mph zone and many drivers are traversing the junction at approaching this speed, notwithstanding that both GCC and the police seem to think that most motorists do not see the speed limit as a target speed. Our opinion is that given the sight lines and complexity any approach speed much in excess of about 35 mph is probably unsafe.

The Council came to the pragmatic view that a limit in the area of the junction of 40 mph made sense, and should materially reduce its accident record.

Secondly, speeds generally along the A46/A4173 between Painswick, Edge and Stroud needed to be reduced, and the blanket 50 mph limit encouraged drivers to drive to the limit. A reduction to 40 mph or lower approaching the main junction was highly desirable but was also justified by the significant number of difficult accesses, lanes, driveways etc. off the main roads. The Parish Council produced a detailed report on this in 2009.

GCC Highways and the police (based apparently on a rather narrow interpretation of national guidelines), dismissed this request because speed limits must be 'self-explaining' to motorists, i.e. drivers will ignore limits if the reason for them is not clear. Thus, because the routes in question are primarily through countryside, drivers will ignore the limits as the hazards do not obviously present themselves. Worse still a lower limit might encourage dangerous overtaking.

The Parish Council considers the approach of GCC and the police does not take into account the way in which, nationally, the much stricter enforcement of speed limits in recent years has made motorists generally much more compliant with speed limits (whether perceived necessary or not) and a lower limit on these roads would be effective (even without excessive compliance activity by the police).

The Pitchcombe Parish Council thus remains of the view that a very effective means of reducing accidents at the main junction and elsewhere in the Parish would be to impose a 40 mph limit.

The Council is of course open to other suggestions but nothing else has been mooted in the last 25 years that might be acceptable to all the

parties. We are therefore requesting that GCC should, as the responsible authority, take action to reduce the speed limits.

Yours sincerely

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Chairman, Pitchcombe Parish Council

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