

MELKSHAM
HIGHWAY MATTERS QUESTIONS
6th December 2023

The whole length of the A3102 from Melksham to Junction 16 of the M4 has been identified as a route for safety improvements. Funding has been provided by the Department for Transport to enable works to be undertaken.

A web page on the Council website is to be added shortly that will provide full details of the scheme.

What plans are there to re-surface the A365 at the area where it meets the roundabout and junction with Falcon Way. This is a very heavy traffic route, and the surface is badly degraded.

Features on the 2024/25 program of works

The TransWilts Community Rail Partnership was founded by community members in Melksham over a decade ago and has been instrumental in helping build passenger journey numbers up from 3,000 to 75,000 per annum, with projections of over 250,000 on an appropriate hourly service which in addition will bring better transport links from Trowbridge and Westbury to Chippenham and Swindon. A huge success story, and a massively important transport artery into the future that's reflected by Wiltshire Council's local plan and the joint Melksham Neighbourhood plan. Thank you to Wiltshire Council and Great Western Railway for being so supportive. However, I am worried about Community Rail and the service into the future. With the passing of the only remaining director based in Melksham, with the departure of the managing director, and with the closure of their Melksham Hub Cafe, the TransWilts Community Rail Partnership has become uncoupled from the communities along the line. There isn't a single director left living in any of our towns or to be seen using the service. With five out of seven TransWilts directors now being past, present or wannabe conservative Wiltshire Councillors, could the Director of Highways and Transport tell us what the council's plans are for the future of the TransWilts Community Rail Partnership? Are you looking to re-invigorate the community element to include the current and future user community?

The Council is very much aware of the value of the CRP and its achievements, and we continue to offer financial support towards its activities. We will do our best to encourage increased community participation, however we have no current plans to intervene directly.

A350

What view will Wiltshire Council take for the future of the A350, if it is not supported for funding by the Government? Given the Council's concern about congestion, if it is not funded, will Wiltshire defer housing development in the Melksham Neighbourhood Area until it is?

The Council's policy is to continue selectively improving the A350, at the same time encouraging the Department for Transport to take forward National Highways' recommendations for improving North South Connectivity. We hope to learn more early in the new year.

The increased numbers of houses and other development in the area will increase traffic flows on the A350 in coming years. This is clearly stated in the documents accompanying the recent consultation on the Melksham bypass. We already see a number of accidents occurring on the uncontrolled junctions emerging onto the A350 from Ashton Common and Great Hinton; the most recent a major incident involving a minibus full of children. What do Wiltshire Council propose to

do to improve the safety of these junctions both for current traffic volumes and especially for the higher volumes in future, and when will this happen?

Collisions resulting in personal injury are monitored across the whole Wiltshire road network. Collision history forms the basis of the annual safety schemes programme that seeks to design and introduce engineering measure to prevent further collisions from taking place. The junctions mentioned are not yet at a point that intervention is justified but they will continue to be monitored.

The Local Plan proposes a new Country Park on land at Paxcroft Farm. This will be attractive to residents living in villages on the east side of the A350 (ie Ashton Common, Keevil, Steeple Ashton etc.). The plan as currently described does not indicate any safe pedestrian access to the park from the east, without having to cross the A350. The park could form a good traffic free connection from the villages to Trowbridge and Melksham as it connects to the new Semington cycle route at Hilperton. Would Wiltshire Council consider installing a bridge or underpass on the A350 to provide this connection to the new park?

There are no plans to build a grade separated crossing over the A350. That said, the allocation is at concept stage - detailed matters relating to access/parking etc will be dealt with at a later stage.

How will we deal with excess traffic from A350 onto a small road running parallel to A350, being used as a rat run, proving difficult to get a SID, quite off-putting. Existing 30mph speed limit arguably unsafe as is?

Strategic priority for A350 have been developing an M4-to-South-Coast strategy, moving slowly but does propose investment. Involves significant national investment, bodes well long-term. Disappointing to see BANES' freight management strategy negatively impacting on Wiltshire so much. Important for Wiltshire to understand that A350 will continue to be a freight route and occasional diversions through neighbouring villages necessary, process for speed limit review done through LHFIFG. Metro count usually the first step, SID can have significant impact on bringing slightly-above-limit speeds down, 20mph limit or zone also may be feasible. Cleveland Bridge now open again with 18 tonne weight limit, should help.

Gullies

A)Steeple Ashton has a central area prone to flooding after heavy rainfall events. The Council has agreed that the highway drains should be cleared out annually on a priority basis. This was last done in September 2022 and, despite reports of gullies backing up, we have not seen any clear indication of a date for this work to be carried out this year. What does our community have to do to get Wiltshire Council to undertake this preventative maintenance work on an annual basis?

a) While we do work to a program this can be delayed by extreme weather conditions.

b) Weeds and gutter blockages are getting worse. Is Wiltshire Council planning to tackle this more? How can the Parish Councils help?

b) Consideration of possible solutions is currently underway, Mechanical removal via sweepers is an option and or use of herbicide offers benefits.

During last winter our community lived for many months with disruption and road works on Common Hill due to drainage issues. We now see the lower part of this same drain blocked and surface water is overflowing onto the road. This will turn to ice once the really cold weather hits, creating a serious hazard at the junction with Ashton Road. Once again we are unable to get a

commitment from Wiltshire Council highways team as to when this will be further surveyed, let alone actually repaired. what is it that we have to do to get these issues addressed?

Works were undertaken over the summer to address this issue but additional measures have been identified and our programmed in to be undertaken prior to Christmas.

Speed

a) There are a number of local villages which have recently adopted 20mph speed limits (Edington and Bratton for instance). What is the criteria for these limits to be considered?

a) The Council has an adopted Policy on 20mph restrictions. The primary requirement is that existing vehicle speeds must be 24mph or lower. This accords with Department for Transport advice. Requests for a review to establish if a 20mph restriction can be introduced is done through the LHFIFG.

b) Speed mitigation measures are expensive; what options do Parish Councils have to pay for these when they have very little funds of their own to spare? Match funding only works when you have the funds to match with.

b) The Parish Council could raise additional funds by raising their precept. Many Council's across the County have done this.

As a general comment, the highways team do not make enough effort to liaise with local communities to advise them of upcoming works nor pro-actively engage over issues such as those highlighted by questions 3 and 4 above. We seem to be left with having to monitor the works map on One Network to get any indication of what might be about to happen in our community. Each parish has a clerk, is it not possible for the highways team to get in touch when works are planned, our give a monthly update regarding works which are in the pipeline in a given community.

The Highways teams do not have enough resource to engage with all 253 Parish Councils on a monthly basis. One Network is the platform used to record all road works including works being undertaken by utility companies and other parties and provides a comprehensive overview of planned activities and works taking place.

Semington

The conversion of Byway [SEMI 9A / HILP 21 / HILP 22] into a 60mph road for cars and vans. Prior to the decision to incorporate this Byway into a new cycle route between Trowbridge and Melksham it was regularly used by villagers on foot, horseback and cycles. The surface of the Byway was so rough that it was safe to use in these ways because no motor traffic, other than farm and telecoms vehicles, could sensibly contemplate doing so. The fact that the national speed limit applied was of no practical consequence. Now, thanks to the extensive 'improvements', the track is perfectly suitable for fast cars, white vans and road bikes, and the 60mph speed limit now has serious implications. Local knowledge reveals that one outcome of this is that the number of villagers using the Byway has been severely reduced. Another is that those who still do use the Byway do so at considerable personal risk. There have been two safety audits. The first has been characterised as a farce, and certainly not all of the concerns raised by villagers were acted on. The outcomes of the second are awaited, and we shall be interested to see what this says, particularly about the potentially very serious crash that took place on the HILP 21 section. Both audits have been characterised by disdain towards the village from the highways team responsible. Despite several offers by the Parish Council to help inform the conversion process, we were rebuffed. It

was clearly something that was being done to us, rather than with us. This applied to the safety audits as well. We think that the status quo is completely untenable for two reasons: because of the inherent dangers in what Highways has created, and, ironically enough, because of the harm done to village recreation opportunities. The Parish Council's favoured solution to this problem is to convert the Byway into a Restricted Byway, with vehicle traffic only being allowed for agricultural and telecoms use. We should like to see bollards or barriers erected at the three entrances to the cycleway with permitted users being given access keys or codes. We do not think that this is controversial, but it is clearly not straightforward. As such, we want a senior officer in Wiltshire Council to take responsibility for carrying it out, rather than leaving the two parish councils to navigate the myriad of departments and bureaucratic obstacles that exist. We think that this is the very least you can do seeing what a mess Highways has made of the whole thing.

A series of independent road safety audits have been undertaken on the Hilperton to Semington cycle route. The most recent being a Stage 4 audit, which is undertaken 12 months after implementation and includes a review of collision data as well as site visits by the audit team. This audit has not raised any concern regarding the surfacing used on the byway or the mixed-use aspect of the route. The audit notes a collision occurred on the byway between Whaddon Lane and the A361 in August 2023, resulting in serious injury. The auditors review finds that the scheme construction was not a contributory factor to this collision. Active Travel England inspectors undertook an audit of the whole route, including the byway section, and outlined their findings in a report to Wiltshire Council. This inspection of the route did not raise any concerns about the mixed-use status of the byway or the surfacing used. The surface treatment used was chosen to adhere to the specification set by the Countryside Agency and Sustrans for mixed use byways such as this that are subject to use by farm vehicles, cyclists, pedestrians, and equestrians. Data collection has shown a slight increase in vehicle movements on the byways between 2022 and 2023 however cycle and pedestrian use has increased following scheme implementation.

Old A350

a) The failure to prevent motor traffic using the old A350 road as a short-cut

When the Semington bypass was constructed a 'bus gate' was erected on the old road adjacent to the police station. The purpose of this was to prevent Semington village being used as a short-cut thereby negating the point of creating a bypass. Although it is Semington village that is mostly affected by the traffic, the gate lies within Melksham Without. Only cycles, buses and emergency vehicles are allowed to transit through the gate along with four named legacy users. There have been unsuccessful attempts to have the gate moved nearer the village. Despite periodic attempts by the Parish Council and the Police to deter usage, there is evidence that, although most people in the village stick to the rules, not all do; and there is evidence also that some local businesses regularly flout the rules. We understand that the police are currently carrying out spot checks on illegal usage, that the ground around it has been re-marked, and that the gate is now routinely closed with a new lock. A metro count check is scheduled for January. The Parish Council would like to see an appropriate solution found to this long-standing problem of misuse and asks that a senior Highways officer takes the lead in ensuring that this is achieved before the end of 2024.

a) The concern is noted, and the matter remains under review. The Police are of course ideally placed to have firsthand knowledge and be able to respond to any evidence of a significant breach of the restrictions.

b) Parking along the old A350

The Parish Council is aware of concerns from residents on the old A350 who live on the Melksham Without side of the canal bridge about careless parking near the bridge that restricts access to their properties. We are concerned that a solution to this might be found which merely serves to shift the parking to the Semington side of the bridge whereby affecting even more properties. We do not want this to happen. We want Highways to take all the housing into account when these issues are addressed, and to fully involve all residents and both parish councils before a response is agreed.

The request for consideration of any change to be viewed in the wider context is noted.

The suitability of narrow side roads within the village for carrying further housing development

Over the last 10 years, Semington has been subject to persistent speculative (off-plan) housing proposals because of the lack of a 5-year HLS. Some of these have been successful resulting in additional traffic using the village side roads [St George's Road / Pound Lane / Church Street]. One common feature of all these applications is that Highways have never raised any objections. It is fair to say that villagers are puzzled by this as, from their point of view, these side roads are narrow, already busy and usually congested; this is particularly true of Pound Lane which carries daily farm traffic and is the location of the village primary school and the preferred parking place of a number of canal boaters. It is considered by residents to be dangerous. The Parish Council would like to understand the methodology used by Highways in coming to its judgements, and requests that a senior Highways office come to a Parish Council meeting to brief the village. The Council is particularly interested in how many houses might be built along these roads before Highways would object.

Agreed

The deteriorating state of the roads and pavements in the village. In common, no doubt, with many another village in the county, the surfaces of parts of our roads and pavements are in a poor and deteriorating state, and we are concerned that unless remedial action is taken now, the problem will become worse and more expensive to fix. The Parish Council would like Highways to survey the village roads and pavements to assess the state of disrepair and come up with a plan for fixing obvious problems. We appreciate that there may well be a queue for doing this.

The council does have a forward plan of strategic maintenance this can be found on our website:
<https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/highways-asset-management>

Intervention levels for highway defects are found within our Highway Inspection Manual that can be found on our Web Site:

https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/media/1360/Highway-inspection-manual/pdf/Wiltshire_Highways_Safety_Inspection_Manual_September_2018.pdf?m=1601049759780

The Council undertakes scheduled inspections on a regular basis to identify defects

Parish steward

Melksham Without Parish Council currently have a Parish Steward 3 days a month and engage fully with the scheme. As we are such a large rural area, the Parish Council ask if we could have a Parish Steward allocated to the parish for more days every month.

The demand for the services of the Parish Steward are high while we will consider the request it needs to be viewed in the context that the Steward is a finite resource.

Public transport

Public transport situation has improved significantly recently, no longer such an outlier compared to other counties. Bus to train and train to bus links need to improve, connectivity not up to scratch. Encouraged further integration between trains and buses. 271, 272 and 273 all go across the top of Station Approach. In new housing areas, buses do not go to the station. Benham House arguably walking distance.

hoping for more demand-responsive transport and bus-train integration. Increased frequency of services. LCWIP – live consultation, local knowledge valued. Grant from DEFRA means another demand-responsive transport service seems possible.

applauds sentiment regarding inter-modal transport perhaps too critical though given that several buses stop within minutes of the station, more important to ensure timetables line up rather than getting the buses to stop in the station forecourt.

Planning

What does it take for Highways to actually object to a planning application? They've not objected to a single application in recent times.

Highways can only object on policy grounds based on hard evidence.

Signage

Horse riders around Redstocks and Devizes Road, requested caution signs for horse riders, Royal Society funding agreed, stumbling block at Wiltshire Council end.

Incident that prompted it involved a fatality, need to wait for coroner's report. Expectation for more widespread measures to be recommended by coroner.

Parking

National government funding devolved to local authorities to address pavement parking.

Double yellow parking a Wiltshire Council issue, pavement parking a Wiltshire Police issue. Parking restrictions might help but that's an LHFIF measure. No plans for Wiltshire Council to ban pavement parking, legislation already there, enforcement the problem.