

Wiltshire Council

Full Council

17 October 2023

Item 15 – Members’ Questions

From Cllr Derek Walters – Corsham Without

To Cllr Caroline Thomas, Cabinet Member for Transport, Street Scene, and Flooding

Question (23-22)

As Cabinet Member for Highways could Caroline Thomas confirm that the Department for Transport delegates decision making on speed limits to the local Highways Authority?

Could she also confirm that the DfT states that this is to allow local knowledge to be used?

Currently local Parishes have to request and contribute to the cost of Speed Limit Assessments. Local Highways and Footway Improvement Groups (LHFIG) have to agree any requests, prioritise them and also contribute to the cost. They do not do this frivolously.

If the Assessments take into account local knowledge and surely the best local knowledge is that of the Parish Councils and LHFIG then why are 75% of requests refused and the remaining 25% mostly watered down (eg. 50 to 40 rather than 50 to 30)?

Could Caroline also confirm that the current view within Wiltshire Highways is that speed limits are of little use in modifying speeds on our roads?

Could Caroline confirm that she is in agreement with this view?

Does the Cabinet Member for Highways have the authority to overrule a decision by Wiltshire Highways?

Response:

The council as Local Highway Authority has the responsibility to set speed limits on local roads.

The Department for Transport Circular 01/13 Setting Local Speed Limits sets out guidance as a basis for assessments of local speed limits. Traffic authorities can set local speed limits in situations where local needs and conditions suggest a speed limit

which is lower than the national speed limit. Speed limits should be evidence-led and self-explaining, and seek to reinforce people's assessment of what is a safe speed to travel.

Speed limits should be seen by drivers as the maximum rather than a target speed.

They should not be used to attempt to solve the problem of isolated hazards, such as a single road junction or reduced forward visibility. The principal aim in determining appropriate speed limits should be to provide a consistent message between speed limits and what the road environments looks like; therefore, changes in speed limit need to be reflective of changes in the road layout and characteristics. This approach is intended to provide consistency across the country for drivers.

The underlying aim should be to achieve a 'safe' distribution of speeds. The key factors that should be considered in any decisions on local speed limits are:

- History of collisions;
- Road geometry and engineering;
- Road function;
- Composition of road users;
- Existing traffic speeds; and
- Road environment.

The consultation process provides the opportunity for the public, interested parties and the police to comment on proposed changes to speed limits.

Speed limits are an important tool in improving road safety, but they need to be set appropriately to be effective. This requires a consistent approach to be taken following Department for Transport guidance.

The Council officers make recommendations based on the Department of Transport guidance and requirements, which in conjunction with the consultations results, enable the Cabinet Member to reach a decision.

Setting speed limits is a legal process which needs to follow the correct procedures in order to ensure they are enforceable and not open to legal challenge.