

REGULATORY COMMITTEE
9th JANUARY 2002

MELKSHAM: FOREST AND SANDRIDGE SCHOOL -
ROAD SAFETY

Purpose of Report

1. To consider the following Notices of Motion from Mr. T.P. Chivers and Mrs. A.B. Barker:-

This Council supports local residents, parents and Melksham Without Parish Council in their efforts to secure the lowering of the speed limit outside Forest and Sandridge School, Melksham, to improve the safety of children and parents. With this in mind, this Council recommends a 20 mph limit be introduced as soon as possible.

and from Mr. W.A. Spiers:-

It is with regret in these days of local partnership and co-operation Liberal Democrat Councillors Terry Chivers and Angie Barker failed or omitted to consult with the local Conservative Member, William Spiers, with regard to the longstanding and ongoing problem of the traffic speed near Forest and Sandridge School, Melksham.

This Council supports a review of the speed limits and traffic calming near Forest and Sandridge School, paying particular attention to rumble strips, speed limit and the inevitable parking hazards at open and close of school, in the best interests of the whole community.

Background

2. The Notices of Motion were included in the Summons of the 20th November 2001 meeting of the County Council. A report was requested for this meeting.

Detail

3. Melksham Without Parish Council is very concerned about traffic speeds outside the school and a reduction in the speed limit is urgently requested. The Acting Headteacher has forwarded 92 letters written by parents and children, expressing their strong feelings about the dangerous and busy main road outside the school. The letters are available for inspection in the **Members' Room**.

4. The District Highway Surveyor has met with the Acting Headteacher on site. In addition to requesting a 20 mph restriction, the Headteacher has concerns about the signing on the approaches to the school. The Highway Surveyor is arranging for the hedge to be cut back to address concerns about poor visibility for drivers leaving the school.
5. To obtain an independent assessment of safety at the school, consultants TRL Limited were appointed to investigate and make recommendations. A copy of the TRL report is available for inspection in the **Members' Room**.

TRL Investigations

6. Of the 150 pupils attending the school, approximately 50 are transported by coach, with the remainder being transported by car. It is believed that pupils do not walk to school due to its distance from the main built-up area. **Appendix 1** indicates the location of the school.
7. In December, TRL conducted a video survey and obtained one week's traffic speed data using pneumatic tube data loggers, one being located close to the entrance to the school and the other approximately ½ km west of the school.

Parking

8. On the day of the video survey it was observed that the first car arrived 40 minutes before the end of school and parked just outside the double white line system. Most of the 20 subsequent cars parked beyond this point, although two stopped within the double white lines, which is illegal. Drivers are only permitted to set down or pick up passengers where there are double white lines. Although there was sufficient width to enable two cars to pass, lorries and cautious drivers waited for gaps in the oncoming traffic before passing parked vehicles.
9. The majority of parents park on the south-east side of the carriageway alongside the verge and footway. This has resulted in damage to the verge. Parents and children then use the narrow footway to walk the short distance to the school. To improve pedestrian facilities and overcome the damage, kerbs could be provided, or the verge removed and the footway widened, according to TRL.

Traffic Speeds

10. The speed data gathered shows that on the A3102 outside the school the 85th percentile speed in both directions is 48 mph. This is slightly below the current 50 mph speed limit and TRL are of the opinion that, considering the environmental aspects of the road and the carriageway widths, the current speed limit is appropriate. However, for approximately 1½ hours each day this is inappropriate for the conditions. To reduce the speed at which drivers currently travel would require physical measures.

Accidents

11. In the five years from 1995 to 2000 there were seven accidents on the ½ km section of the A3102 either side of the school. The three accidents which occurred at school start and finish times involved cars running into the back of waiting cars. All involved slight injury, including two children who were passengers in a car. TRL conclude that the accident record in the immediate vicinity of the school is good.

Signing

12. As the school is located outside the defined urban area of Melksham, it is not obvious to passing motorists that it is a potentially hazardous location involving young children. The advanced warning signs for the school are some distance away and could be lost in the proliferation of other signing in the vicinity. There is no prominent school sign identifying its presence and no zig-zag markings outside the school gates. TRL consider that since the school is located on a main through route, with many drivers who may be unfamiliar with the area, it is desirable to highlight the presence of the school. Currently drivers are confronted by many messages including bends, rumble strips, chevrons and vehicle-activated signs.
13. It is suggested by TRL that if the signing were simplified and the location of the school highlighted, this could draw drivers' attention to a potential hazard and they would take greater care.

School Buses

14. The buses taking children to and from the school use the layby, east of the school, to turn round but outside the school buses mount the footway to pick up and drop off children. This area is also used by parents who drive onto and off the footway where there are also pedestrian accesses to the school playground. There is nothing to prevent a child from walking out of the school on the footway and being hit by a vehicle which has mounted the footway. Also, it is possible for vehicles to stop alongside the buses on the carriageway, although there is no evidence to suggest this is happening. Zig-zag markings would deter this and highlight the presence of the access to passing motorists.
15. TRL suggest that a correctly designed bus layby, kerbed footway and pedestrian access would improve this area.

TRL Conclusions

16. Considering the existing accident record and speed surveys, there is little evidence to suggest that a major road safety issue exists at this location. Therefore, based purely on factual information, it is possible, say TRL, to "do nothing", but this does not take into account the fears expressed by the local Member and parents and children attending the school.
17. Accordingly, TRL have put forward options and, after considering the current behaviour and layout, have recommended that the existing signing and markings be modified and a safer pedestrian access to the school be created. The suggested actions are indicated in **Appendix 2**.

18. TRL have drawn attention to the fact that observations indicate that a high proportion of children were not wearing seat belts and they are of the opinion that this may have been significant in the previous child injury accidents. A road safety education and publicity campaign at the school could be directed at parents regarding the wearing of rear seat belts.

Comment

19. This, unfortunately, is a common problem which is reflected in the fact that almost 50% of Wiltshire child casualties are car passengers. A countywide seat belt campaign is planned for 2002 in the Joint Road Safety Strategy. This is an area where parents themselves can significantly contribute to improved child safety.
20. The funding for traffic management measures in 2001-02 has been allocated to schemes which are currently being progressed. It is recommended that the measures suggested by TRL be implemented at the school as a priority from next year's financial allocation. Although it is difficult to give any firm indication of likely cost, a range of between £35,000 and £50,000 could be considered a reasonable estimate for a straightforward scheme.

Options Considered

21. Do nothing.
22. The physical narrowing of the carriageway and lowering of the speed limit, as indicated in the TRL report.

Recommendation

23. That funding be allocated in 2002-03 to enable signing and lining modifications to be undertaken and a safer pedestrian access created at Forest and Sandridge C of E School.

Reason for Recommendation

24. To increase road safety for parents and pupils at Forest and Sandridge School.

RICHARD J. LANDER

Director of Environmental Services

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report:

Letters from parents and children, TRL report and letter from the Parish Council.

Environmental impact of the Recommendations contained in this Report:

The measures suggested are unlikely to result in any overall change in the environmental situation.

