

**REGULATORY COMMITTEE**

**9<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2002**

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**MELKSHAM: FOREST ROAD - TRAFFIC CALMING SCHEME**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To consider representation on a scheme for traffic calming in Forest Road, Melksham.

**Background**

2. The integrated transport block allocation from the Local Transport Plan (LTP) settlement is being used to progress the Western Wiltshire Sustainable Transport Strategy. Consequently, measures to encourage walking, cycling and the use of public transport are being introduced in the seven towns within the Strategy area.
3. The schemes to be progressed in the towns are agreed by the LTP Working Groups established with representation from the County, District and Town Councils, together with representation from groups such as the Chamber of Commerce and Civic Societies.
4. A comprehensive consultation exercise is undertaken, in excess of the County Council's statutory requirements and that previously carried out for traffic management schemes, involving residents and other stakeholders at all stages of the development of schemes.

**Detail**

5. In June 2001, the Melksham LTP Working Group prioritised Forest Road as an area in particular need of improvements to the pedestrian environment. The County Council, West Wiltshire District Council, Melksham Town Council, Melksham Without Parish Council and Melksham First were represented at the meeting. It was agreed that Melksham First would be an appropriate public forum for progressing a scheme.
6. At a public meeting in September 2001, hosted by Melksham First, officers of the County Council and consultants TRL outlined the innovative pre-design consultation methods to be developed for the Forest Road scheme.
7. Subsequently, in November 2001, a Focus Group meeting to concentrate on residents issues and priorities, and a Stakeholder meeting to establish the initial views of a wider group of interested parties were held.

8. Household surveys were circulated in December 2001 to establish whether views expressed at the Focus Group and Stakeholder meetings were shared by residents who did not attend the meetings. This was followed in January 2002 by a Residents Design Day to consider options and agree the measures to be developed to detail design.
9. In March 2002, the Regulatory Committee allocated £25,000 for traffic calming in Forest Road to top-up the allocation of £50,000 allocated by the Environmental Services Sub-Committee in March 2001.
10. A newsletter was circulated to households in and around Forest Road in June 2002 to update residents on progress with the scheme and advising that the full scheme drawings would be available for viewing and further comment in the Town Hall.

### **Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee**

11. At the July 2002 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, a request was tabled from Mrs. A. Barker, countersigned by Mr. J. Osborn, for further consideration and a review of all options due to the extreme disquiet of Melksham Town Council, local residents and Melksham First regarding the lack of proper consultation carried out in Forest Road on the possible traffic calming scheme.
12. The Chairman of the Committee, Mr. Thomson, personally intervened in this matter to ensure that a solution was found which would meet with the agreement of all parties, including Mrs. Barker, Mr. Osborn and the Town Council. It was agreed that an additional newsletter be produced explaining the principles of the chosen option and mention made of the alternative options considered by the residents who attended the Design Day. A return slip was provided giving the opportunity to indicate whether or not the proposed scheme was supported or other action preferred.
13. A newsletter was drafted and the wording amended to accord with the wishes of Melksham First. It was then distributed by the Town Council to approximately 900 households in Forest Road and the surrounding streets in July 2002, giving until 6<sup>th</sup> September for the return of the questionnaires.
14. In accordance with the statutory procedures, the proposed introduction of a 20 mph zone and construction of speed tables, raised tables and speed cushions in Forest Road were advertised. The views of the District and Town Councils were also formally sought.

### **Response to Consultation**

15. The comments of both West Wiltshire District Council and Melksham Town Council are critical of the consultation process. This is extremely disappointing given the efforts of the County Council to involve the residents at every stage of the scheme development and Mr. Thomson's personal intervention to address earlier concerns. Copies of the letters from the District and Town Councils are attached at **Appendix 1**.

16. The Northern Area Committee of the District Council, while in favour, in principle, of traffic calming in Forest Road, could not support a scheme which did not have the endorsement of the Fire and Ambulance Services or without consultation with disabled groups. It also considered that no conclusion had been reached regarding consultations with public transport operators and the County Council's Passenger Transport Unit. The Committee considered that the consultation had been carried out in an unsatisfactory manner.
17. In response to the District Council criticisms, on three separate occasions over a period of five months letters were sent to the Fire and Ambulance Services seeking their views on the proposals. Telephone calls were made to prompt a response. Confirmation that the Fire Brigade had no adverse comments regarding the proposals was received on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2002. Following a further letter, comments were received from the Ambulance Service on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2002.
18. The Ambulance Service have responded with comments of a more general nature about traffic calming rather than specifically about the Forest Road Scheme as follows:

*Wiltshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust supports any measures that aid safety to all communities. However, any speed control or traffic calming measures implemented by Local or County Councils **will** have an effect on the liability of Wiltshire Ambulance Service to meet the stringent conditions of timely response imposed by Central Government.*

*Also any alterations to the road surface imposed by installing calming measures will have an adverse effect on the patient being carried within the ambulance. As you are no doubt aware, road surface conditions within the County are far from perfect at this time and any additional features imposed may well increase the discomfort imposed on injured, elderly or patients.*
19. The views of local groups representing the disabled are sought on schemes. However, the Town Council has indicated that no such group currently exists in Melksham. Advertising the proposals in the local press gives the opportunity for individuals or groups, such as the disabled to comment. No such representation has been received.
20. A meeting was held in June 2002 with colleagues in the Passenger Transport Unit, which resulted in the proposals being modified to accord with their requirements. The bus operators have made no objections to the current scheme. The Police have also raised no objections.
21. The assertion that the consultation was undertaken in an unsatisfactory manner is strongly refuted. As outlined previously in the report, extensive efforts have been made, well in excess of the County Council's statutory duties or obligations, to involve residents at every stage in the development of a scheme and to keep them informed of progress.

22. The Town Council welcomes the principle of traffic calming measures and the reduction in the speed limit to 20 mph but has expressed concern that a number of issues, in addition to the comment that the requests of residents have not been taken seriously. A response to the points made by the Town Council is given in **Appendix 2**.
23. The primary reason for the last newsletter and questionnaire was to give residents a further opportunity to either support or object to the proposed scheme, particularly, in response to the assertion of the Town Council and others that the scheme, involving the construction of vertical deflections, was not supported by the majority of residents. It is alleged that alternative calming measures involving horizontal deflections are favoured by the residents. This has not been borne out by the completed questionnaires received.
24. Out of 237 returned questionnaires:
- 127 indicate support for the proposed scheme;
  - a further 25 whilst supporting the scheme suggest minor amendments;
  - 37 would like to see alternative calming measures;
  - 39 do not support any traffic calming measures at all;
  - 9 do not indicate any clear preference.
25. Of the 25 requests for minor amendments, over 50% either express concern about the use of speed cushions on the basis of experience of the Town Bridge cushion, or traffic being diverted elsewhere. The single cushion on the Town Bridge is not effective at reducing speed and is to be removed. Twin cushions are proposed for Forest Road similar to those used successfully elsewhere in the County. The streets surrounding Forest Road have been identified by the Melksham LTP Working Group as potential future sites for traffic calming. The remaining suggestions are varied and some will be satisfied by the scheme.

### **Financial Implications**

26. A total of £75,000 has been allocated from the integrated transport block of the LTP for traffic calming in Forest Road. Under the current financial regulations the money must be spent by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2003 or returned to the Government. Therefore, any delay now would prejudice implementation of the scheme.

### **Conclusions: Options Considered**

27. Abandon any proposals for traffic calming in Forest Road. Develop alternative traffic calming scheme in Forest Road.

### **Recommendation**

28. That the traffic calming measures for Forest Road, Melksham, be implemented as advertised.

### **Reason for Recommendation**

29. The need for traffic calming has been identified by the Melksham LTP Working Group and funding has been allocated to the scheme by the Regulatory Committee. The current proposals have been developed by working closely with the local community and subjected to extensive consultation which has received overwhelming support from the residents.

**RICHARD J. LANDER**

Director of Environmental Services

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

Letters from: West Wiltshire District Council  
Melksham Town Council  
Wiltshire Constabulary  
Wiltshire Fire Brigade  
Wiltshire Ambulance Service  
Completed questionnaires.

### **Environmental impact of the Recommendation contained in this Report:**

The introduction of traffic calming is intended to encourage walking and cycling rather than the use of the motor car, with obvious environmental benefits.

