
Meeting: Executive
Date: 7 December, 2010
Subject: Vehicle Speed Management in Communities in Central Bedfordshire
Report of: Cllr David McVicar, Portfolio holder for Safer Communities and Healthier Lifestyles
Summary: The purpose of this report is to present a methodology for the review of vehicular speed limits in rural communities requested by the Executive.

Advising officer: Gary Alderson, Director of Sustainable Communities
Contact Officer: Basil Jackson, Assistant Director Highways & Transport
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Executive
Key Decision: Yes
Reason for urgency/ exemption from call-in (if applicable) Not applicable

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

The Council priorities affected by this paper are:

- creating safer communities; and
- managing growth effectively.

Financial:

This paper outlines proposed changes to how Government policy could be applied locally to be more flexible, allowing the Council to deliver lower speed limits in smaller communities. If implemented, these changes are likely to have cost implications in the order of £1.0 million. Whilst exact amounts are not known at this stage, money for speed management is predicted to halve in the coming years. A change in policy as outlined in this report would therefore have to take such financial constraints into account.

Legal:

If implemented, these changes will have legal implications as per the Council's duty under the Traffic Management Act 2004. New speed limits must be implemented in accordance with current regulations and statutory processes. Failure to do so would render any limit introduced as unenforceable and may place the Council at liability of litigation.

Risk Management:

There is potential for litigation as outlined above.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

None as a result of this report. Any work arising from this report would be undertaken by our in-house contractor and overseen by CBC staff in our role as client.

Equalities/Human Rights:

None as a result of this report.

Community Safety:

The Traffic Management Act was introduced in 2004 to tackle congestion and disruption on the road network. The Act places a duty on local traffic authorities to ensure the expeditious movement of traffic on their road network and the networks of surrounding authorities. The Act gives authorities additional tools to better manage parking policies, moving traffic enforcement and the coordination of street works which are all important components of community safety.

Sustainability:

Effective speed management is a key part of accommodating Central Bedfordshire's growth agenda and ensuring that the district is "open for business".

Summary of Overview and Scrutiny Comments

- This report has not been considered by Overview and Scrutiny.

RECOMMENDATION(S):**That the Executive:**

- | | |
|------------|---|
| (a) | consider the contents and implications of the report; and |
| (b) | specifically endorse or reject the suggested changes to existing policy. |

*Reason for**Recommendation(s)*

To allow a more flexible application of the national guidelines to deliver lower speed limits in the smaller communities of Central Bedfordshire.

Background.

1. At its meeting of 17th August 2010, the Executive considered a request from Councillor Chapman to support the implementation of changes to existing speed limits in Husborne Crawley requested by the community. A petition received from residents requesting this and other measures had been considered in April 2010 by the Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities and Healthier Lifestyles. This decision was called-in for consideration by Overview and Scrutiny Committee for re-consideration by the Portfolio Holder at a subsequent meeting.

2. At its August meeting, the Executive was minded to support the community and requested that officers undertake works to implement changes to reduce the existing speed limit from 40 to 30mph in Husborne Crawley and implement a 20mph speed limit outside the school.
3. The Executive recognised that its decision had been taken in isolation and that as a result, there was insufficient context in which other communities could review this decision when considering their own situation. Officers were therefore asked to undertake a review of speed limits across Central Bedfordshire to consider how best to support and work with communities concerned about speed and to achieve their objectives.

Information and Context

4. Requests for a review of, and changes to, speed limits (mainly in rural areas) are received frequently via elected members, the Helpdesk, local councils and members of the public. In some cases petitions are also received. This is an almost weekly occurrence.
5. Between 2008 and 2010, Bedfordshire Highways undertook a district wide review of speed limits on A and B roads as required by Central Government. This was carried out using the guidance issued by the Department for Transport Circular "01/2006 Setting Local Speed Limits". There is currently no other policy in place in Central Bedfordshire that overrides or supersedes this guidance and it is used as a best practice benchmark nationally. The A and B road review was funded from the area based grant over two years and the resulting engineering works over three years. In the review, 23 A and B roads, 20 C roads and 36 village speed limits were assessed. The costs of doing this were £133k for data collection, review, consultation and orders and £266k in engineering works, including signs and gateways.
6. The Police have been a constant and valued partner throughout this process. By the middle of 2009 the statutory work on A and B roads was complete. All speed related requests received since that time have been retained for investigation as resources permit. There are currently in excess of 40 outstanding requests on the list maintained by Amey and this continues to increase.
7. Within the 2010/11 work programme a sum of £25k has been identified to undertake speed limit review requests. Any changes to orders or engineering works recommended as a result of individual inspections will be listed for inclusion in a future work programme. To undertake a speed assessment, site observations and report on an individual location costs in the order of £2k to £2.5k. On that basis it is unlikely that it will be possible to undertake more than 10 completed assessments within this financial year with the available budget.

Suggested Changes to Policy

8. Whilst the Department for Transport guidelines have been fairly applied by officers to the speed limit review to date Members clearly feel that there are occasions where this fails to meet the aspirations of a local community and that as a result, local people feel their concerns are not being addressed.

9. It is understood that elected Members wish to see a modified approach that has a more flexible application of the existing guidelines that is able to deliver lower speed limits in the smaller communities. To change the way this is considered it is necessary to look at two aspects:
- the way a village is defined; and
 - the depth and strength of local opinion.

Definition of a village

10. Under current guidance it is generally presumed that, unless there are particular circumstances to the contrary, villages will normally be subject to a 30mph limit. A village is defined within the guidance as:

“having 20 or more houses on one or both sides of a road in a minimum distance of 600m”.

11. In seeking to amend the definition it must be considered that there needs to be a clear message to drivers that they are in a place where people live. Research shows that, whether consciously or not, drivers will seek to justify their actions. In this way the erection of signs alone will never be sufficient to slow drivers significantly. However, where there is strong evidence of occupation, a lowering of speed limit will be better observed. To achieve this in a meaningful way therefore it is suggested that the definition of a village be changed to the following:

“Named communities where there are less than 20 houses but with frontage development on both sides of the road grouped within a carriageway length of no less than 300m that these be considered as a community potentially suitable for a speed limit of 30mph”.

12. This will still exclude scattered communities and those where no obvious frontage development is present, but it does represent a significant step change in policy. Where there is development *on one side of the road only, then a 40mph limit may be appropriate*, but in all cases this will be dependant upon the speeds measured during the assessment.

Local Opinion

13. In the previous speed assessment work, local opinion has been considered but has generally been given less weight than the physical evidence and guidance. This has been the only way to apply the guidance equitably across the whole process. Where changes have been proposed from the review, those changes have always been implemented in consultation with the parish/town council concerned. It is clear that elected Members wish local opinion to be given a higher priority, therefore officers suggest that, where the revised definition of a village is met and there is significant local support, then those communities would be offered a 30mph limit (or 40mph where appropriate).

14. It is possible to do this within the spirit of the existing Department for Transport Guidance. There are however a number of considerations in doing this:
- A significant body of work has already been undertaken to review speed limits in the district. This resulted in a number of engineering proposals being implemented;
 - implementation of speed limits is no guarantee of compliance or even of significant change in driver behaviour; and
 - the current guidelines are national ones and are currently the only ones available to us.
15. In Central Bedfordshire there are, excluding the significant towns, 71 recorded named communities listed by the Council ranging from 30 to over 8000 population. Many of those may comply with the proposed criteria but it is impossible to be specific off plan. However, we do know from a recent analysis of submitted town and parish plans that all 25 plans request improvements in the area of highways, speeding, and traffic management. Twenty-one would like to see action against speeding through traffic calming and 13 suggest reduced speed limits. Clearly, this does not represent all the communities but, if factored up, would suggest that all parishes are likely to have some desire to influence speed and that 40 or so would seek a review of their speed limit.
16. The current method for the implementation of a speed limit is to:
- implement a speed limit order
 - erect speed limit signs
 - install gateways
 - install patches and roundels on the carriageway
17. The guide costs for this are
- Order - £3.5k to 5k
 - Signs - £1k each location
 - Gateways and markings - £8k each location
18. Thus a community with a simple entrance and exit would cost in the region of £23k per community. Whatever is implemented must be implemented in accordance with current regulations and statutory processes. Failure to do this would render any limit introduced unenforceable and may place the Council at liability of litigation. Taken overall for 40 communities this would equate to close to £1.0 million (i.e. £920,000)

Background Papers (Open to public inspection)

None

Appendices

Appendix A - Work process covering a TRO