
Meeting: Traffic Management Committee
Date: 27 March 2012
Subject: Proposed Consultation on Traffic Calming Measures, Downs Road, Dunstable and Petition for Downs Road Traffic Calming Measures
Report of: Basil Jackson, Assistant Director of Highways and Transport
Summary: The report provides the Traffic Management Committee with details relating to the outcome of the temporary Downs Road Closure and to consider requests made within the petition. The report seeks the approval of The Executive Member for Sustainable Communities – Services, Councillor Brian Spurr to consult local residents on a number of traffic calming options.

Contact Officer: David Bowie, Head of Service, Traffic Management
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: Dunstable Manshead
Function of: Highways and Transport

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

The Council priorities affected by this paper are:

- creating safer communities; and
- managing growth effectively.

Financial:

There is currently no budget allocation for the construction of traffic calming measures in Downs Road or within the surrounding road network. However, there is a Local Area Transport Plan allocation for the implementation of a 20 mph zone to cover the area under consideration. If minded to proceed the financial implication ranges from £13,000 TO £81,000 depending on the option chosen.

Legal:

None as part of this report.

Risk Management:

None as part of this report.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

None as part of this report.

Equalities/Human Rights:

Ensuring all residents are treated fairly, and minority groups' concerns fully considered.

Community Development/Safety:

A reduction in through traffic and associated speeding would create a safer residential road environment and reduce the likelihood and severity of road traffic accidents.

Sustainability:

None as part of this report.

RECOMMENDATION:

That, following consideration of the matters raised within the report and petition, the Executive Member for Sustainable Communities – Services Councillor Brian Spurr grants permission to consult local residents on four traffic calming options as identified within the report.

Background and Information.

1. The traffic problems in Downs Road have been an on going concern for residents for many years. Previous Highway Authority Bedfordshire County Council, instructed its consultants Jacobs Babbie to undertake a study of the traffic problems back in June 1993. That report concluded:-

'This report has demonstrated that there is a significant level of rat-running through the Downside area, predominantly from north to south. A number of routes are used, the most common of which are between Downs Road and Mayfield Road and Park Road and Borough Road. Complete elimination of all rat-running via Downs Road would require such restrictive measures that severe inconvenience would be caused to local residents, but it should be possible by traffic-calming measures to reduce its volume to a tolerable level. The exact format of any calming will need to be the subject of local consultation.'

2. In the following years whilst there was some discussion and consultation with residents no further action was taken by the County Council. Following the creation of Central Bedfordshire Council and support for action to resolve the traffic problems by local members an 'origin and destination' survey was carried out in the area on Tuesday 29th March 2011 to ascertain the levels of traffic using the roads in the area as a cut through. The survey was undertaken over a 12 hour period from 7.00 am to 7.00 pm the results of which are provided at Appendix A to this report. The surveys do show that there is a problem with through traffic on Downs Road with approximately 40% of all traffic not originating from the immediate residential roads as it is simply passing through the area.
3. The residents of Downs Road have also complained about the high speeds of traffic using the road. Bedfordshire Police undertook their own traffic and speed survey (24hr, 7 days) which showed that 5% of the traffic exceeded the 30mph speed limit. Their survey also showed that during the week long survey Downs Road had over 18,000 vehicles use it at the point where the survey was taken (between Grove Road and Borough Road). Whilst the Council's recent origin and destination survey was conducted for a 12hr period on one day the traffic figures obtained suggest traffic flows in excess of 14,000 vehicles per week.
4. Following the results of the origin and destination survey and with the approval and support of the local member, Councillor Roger Pepworth, an experimental temporary road closure with associated signing was placed in Downs Road at a point between Grove Road and Allen Close. This action immediately prevented Downs Road from being used as a cut through. The closure was put in place on Friday 11th November 2011.
5. An experimental traffic order allows the highway authority to implement measures and consult the public on its effects prior to any decision being made to permanently implement that feature. Such an order gives the highway authority the opportunity to adjust the measures implemented to obtain the best possible outcome.
6. Following the implementation the council received a considerable number of formal representations about the experimental closure. In total there were 108 household responses of which 78 were against the closure and 30 were in favour of the experiment. Whilst there were considerably more responses than households counted, any identified from outside the immediate residential area were discounted and only one response per household was accepted to prevent the figures being skewed by multiple objections or support from a single address.
7. On Tuesday 13th December 2011 another origin and destination survey was carried out over the same 12 hour period 7.00 am to 7.00 pm

(results at Appendix A). The surveys showed that there had been little to no overall change in the volume of traffic coming through the residential area except that motorists were now using Park Road to enter and exit the area instead of Downs Road. This closure had a noticeable effect on Downs Road insofar as a reduction in traffic with the equivalent increase on Park Road.

8. In order to discuss the results of the surveys and to consider what changes might be made to further the experiment, a public meeting was organised and held at Priory Middle School in the evening of Wednesday 25th January 2012. The hall was booked to hold 200 people however it was estimate that well over 400 people attended the meeting. Unfortunately, the meeting was exceptionally unruly and officers, councillors and police were unable to speak without constant interruption. It was clear that there was a majority of individuals who had turned up to the meeting with the sole purpose of having the experimental closure removed and would not be placated until that end had been achieved. Therefore, towards the end of the meeting a vote was taken on various options moving forward, including the removal of the closure. The vast majority of those present voted to have the closure removed which only served to confirm the outcome of the formal representations already received by the council.
9. Following the meeting numerous complaints were received from residents that the meeting was exceptionally unruly and that those disruptive individuals at the meeting had not given the officers a fair chance to explain the alternative options nor give those present reasonable opportunity to consider the alternatives without feeling intimidated. Accordingly, the residents of Downs Road have now submitted a petition requesting the Council to implement traffic calming measures along the worst effected section of Downs Road (Appendix B - Petition). The petition contains the signatures of 70 residents of Downs Road from 37 households.
10. The petition proposes three potential traffic calming alternatives all of which involve use of narrowings with road humps, parking restrictions and a reduced speed limit of 20mph through the effected section of Downs Road. The various proposals are identified on pages 3 and 4 of the petition at Appendix B.
11. Having reviewed the proposals, whilst it is accepted that speeds are likely to be reduced, the measures suggested are highly unlikely to resolve the issues of high volumes of through traffic using Downs Road. With regard to the proposals of reducing the speed limit to 20mph, the Council has already decided that this residential area will be the subject of a reduced speed limit (subject to public consultation) and accordingly an allocation of funding has been allocated in the coming financial year to implement such a scheme. The other minor issues of waiting restrictions at various locations along Downs Road

can be addressed by the parking enforcement team as part of on going implementation of the Central Bedfordshire Parking Strategy.

12. There are a number of appropriate alternative proposals that residents could be formally consulted upon as follows:-
 1. A road closure at Hillside Road
 2. A road closure at both Downs Road and Park Road towards Great Northern Road
 3. Make both Downs Road and Park Road one way in opposing directions with a closure of Downs Road at the bend near Barton Avenue and with Hillside Road one way into Mayfield Road
 4. Make Great Northern Road one way towards the A5 High Street South

These options with works and associated costs are provided in the table presented at Appendix C.

13. Whilst none of the above proposals will totally solve all of the traffic issues in Downs Road they should, coupled with the impending 20mph zone, reduce traffic volumes and speeds to an acceptable level without unduly disrupting access for the residents themselves.

Conclusion and Way Forward

14. It is accepted that there is no ideal solution to the traffic related problems on Downs Road and that in order to improve the traffic conditions the residents will be required to accept some disruption. However, the suggested options 1 to 4 above seek to minimise that disruption whilst still achieving overall benefits of reduced traffic volumes and speeds.
15. It is therefore proposed that a consultation exercise takes place early within the new financial year with the results being presented back to the Executive Member for Sustainable Communities – Services for decision and approval to proceed with a chosen scheme (subject to funding).

Appendices:

Appendix A – Origin and Destination Traffic Counts

Appendix B – Downs Road Petition

Appendix C – Scheme Options and Cost Estimates

Appendix C

Option No.	Scheme description	Works required	Notices & Traffic Regulation Orders information	Notes / Comments	Estimate (£)
1	Hillside Road - road closure	Road closure - kerb & drainage works. Provision of grass verge, signs & amendments to existing bollards	TRO for road closure		£13,000.00
2	Downs Road & Park Road - road closures	Road closures - kerb & footway works. Provision of signs & bollards. Drainage works. Road markings	TRO for road closure		£27,000.00
3	Downs Road & Park Road - one way. Downs Road - road closure and Hillside Road one way.	One way - illuminated signs. Road closure - kerb & footway works. Provision of signs, bollards & a planter. Drainage works & road markings.	TRO for road closure & one way	Additional funding recommended for improvement / resurfacing of existing footways	£38,000.00
4	Great Northern Road - one way	Removal of existing traffic islands. Provision of on-street parking (build outs, bollards, road markings). Footway & drainage works. Provision of illuminated signs.	TRO for one way		£81,000.00

