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**Meeting:** Traffic Management Meeting  
**Date:** 29 January 2014  
**Subject:** Petition Requesting Central Bedfordshire Council to reconsider 20mph speed limits in Dunstable

**Report of:** Jane Moakes, Assistant Director Community Safety and Public Protection

**Summary:** This report presents a petition organised by a resident of Dunstable requesting that the Council reconsiders the implementation of the 20mph speed limits in Dunstable as they are putting the safety of road users in danger.

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**Contact Officer:** Nick Chapman  
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**Public/Exempt:** Public

**Wards Affected:** All Dunstable wards

**Function of:** Council

## **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

### **Council Priorities:**

To improve highway safety, facilitate the free flow of traffic and improve the amenity of streets for residents.

### **Financial:**

The 20mph speed limit zones in most residential areas of Dunstable have recently been introduced at considerable cost. The removal of the speed limits or alterations to them would entail significant additional work and cost.

### **Legal:**

Central Bedfordshire Council is the highway and traffic authority for the road network in Central Bedfordshire. An important function of the authority is to manage the local road network in a safe, efficient and equitable manner.

### **Risk Management:**

Failure to deliver an efficient, effective and enforceable road network would be detrimental to the safe and expeditious use of the road network by all and could be damaging to the local community as well as economic growth.

### **Staffing (including Trades Unions):**

None from this report

**Equalities/Human Rights:**

Public authorities have a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, to eliminate unlawful discrimination and to foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Creating an attractive and accessible public realm has a part to play in getting people out and about.

One objective of providing 20mph speed limits is to ensure that the most vulnerable members of the community have fair and safe access to the public realm. Disabled people, in particular, place a high priority on this.

**Community Safety:**

Reduced speed limits are shown to improve safety for all road users but specifically for those vulnerable groups such as cyclists and pedestrians as well as improving amenity for all residents in those areas.

**Sustainability:**

None from this report.

**RECOMMENDATION(S):**

**That the Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Services notes the content of the report.**

**Background and Information**

1. An online petition has been received signed by 302 people, mainly living in Dunstable and Luton, expressing concerns about the recently introduced 20mph speed limits in Dunstable.
2. The petition heading states the following:-

“I feel the recent enforcement of 20mph speed limits in Dunstable is unacceptable, and is putting the safety of road users in further danger. By abiding by the new speed limit, I myself and others, are now contesting with people overtaking or driving far too close behind us who are either unaware of the speed limit due to poor documentation or are just plain ignoring it. I also find that travelling at 20 is an unnatural speed and very difficult to maintain, and I am now finding myself concentrating more on keeping my speedometer at 20 to avoid a speeding fine, than I am concentrating on the road ahead of me. I agree that some do drive far too fast exceeding the previous 30mph speed limit, and yes I feel that these should be dealt with for causing dangerous situations, however lowering the speed limit is not dealing with these people and is only putting sensible road users in more potential danger. If you agree with the above and feel that the above situation should be reconsidered, please leave a signature and petition for change. Thanks for your support.”

3. In recent months 20mph speed limits have been introduced in virtually all residential streets in Dunstable. The exceptions being the main through-routes, including the A5 High Street, A505 Church Street / Luton Road, B489 West Street and A5120 Houghton Road.
4. It is to be stressed that the creation of 20mph speed limited areas or zones within the residential areas of Dunstable was highlighted by elected members at the Local Area Transport Plan 3 consultation meetings as the highest priority alongside measures to tackle the rat running traffic through the area. These were thus included within the plan for Dunstable and adopted by the Council following the Local Area Transport Plan consultation process. This action is considered to be a key component of tackling speeding and rat running through the residential areas of Dunstable in the interim period until the M1-A5 link road can be constructed to relieve the pressure of through traffic. This is still some years away.

### **Conclusion and Way Forward**

5. Nationally, there is a trend towards introducing lower speed limits, particularly in residential areas. Government Regulations and guidance have generally made it easier and less costly for local Councils to introduce lower speed limits on their roads. Evidence collected over a number of years indicates that lower speed limits reduce the number and severity of vehicle collisions, so Government has encouraged highway authorities to introduce more 20mph speed limits.
6. The traditional default urban speed limit of 30mph has been in place for many years and the move towards 20mph limits is likely to take some time for drivers to adapt to. Hence, it is accepted that some drivers may consider 20mph to be excessively slow and their driving behaviour will reflect this. It is anticipated that over time drivers will begin to accept lower limits and modify their driving accordingly.
7. It is also accepted that compliance will vary from minor residential streets where the character of the roads naturally lend themselves to lower speeds, whereas on the main through-routes a 20mph speed limit is less likely to be observed. It is on these more main roads where targeted traffic restraint measures have been used to support the 20mph limits and it is possible that further steps may be needed.

8. Research suggests that 20mph limits are successful in reducing actual vehicle speeds, albeit with varying degrees of success. If a reasonable proportion of drivers adhere to the 20mph limit, then it will improve road safety. From recent Government research it was found that in all of the pedestrian datasets, the risk of fatality increases slowly until impact speeds of around 30 mph. Above this speed, risk increases rapidly – the increase is between 3.5 and 5.5 times from 30 mph to 40 mph. In addition, the actual risk of a collision occurring at speeds below 30mph is significantly reduced as the overall stopping distance is significantly reduced. The stopping distance at 20mph is half that of the stopping distance at 30mph. We would therefore reasonably expect lower vehicle speeds to reduce the number of collisions and the severity of any collisions that do occur in those areas subject to the new 20mph speed limits.
9. The 20mph speed limits have only been in place for a short period of time, so it is felt that it is far too early to draw any reliable conclusions about their effectiveness. Likewise, it would be premature to consider any remedial measures or the removal of the 20mph speed limits. It is therefore recommended that the operation of the 20mph speed limits be monitored over the coming months and that a full appraisal (before and after study) of the effectiveness of the limits be produced following 18 months of full operation.