

SEVENOAKS JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD – 14 MARCH 2012

A224 POLHILL AND LONDON ROAD: SPEED LIMITS AND ROAD SAFETY

Report of the: Kent County Council Director of Highways & Transportation

Status: For Consideration

Executive Summary: To consider responses to public consultation on a proposed reduction in speed limit in Polhill and London Road, Sevenoaks.

This report supports the Key Aim of Reducing speed, encouraging safer driving and tackling known speeding crash hotspots.

Chairman Cllr. James London

Head of Service Kent County Council Head of Transportation – Tim Read

Recommendations: That:

- (i) the speed limit on A224 London Road and Polhill Sevenoaks be reduced to 50mph between Calcutta Club Restaurant and Star Hill roundabout as illustrated in Appendix A of this report;
 - (ii) Members NOTE making Polhill a single lane in each direction (with corresponding cycle lanes) will be investigated only if funding is allocated either to its maintenance or other improvement.
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Background

- 1 As part of the 2010 annual road safety assessment for Kent, the junction of A224 Polhill and Pilgrims Way in Dunton Green was identified as having a worse road safety record than would be expected for a junction of this type. Five crashes resulting in personal injury were reported to the police as having occurred at this junction in the period January 2007 – December 2009.
- 2 A study of police records revealed a pattern to the crashes that elsewhere has been successfully remedied by modifying the junction layout. These modifications (a traffic island to prevent overtaking, improved traffic signs to warn drivers of the hazards and better roadmarkings to encourage lane discipline) started on site on 20 February 2012 works and are due to be completed on 17 March.
- 3 In addition to these physical changes, officers were of the opinion that reducing the speed-limit to 50mph on Polhill and London Road between Star Hill Road and Badgers Mount roundabout (illustrated as Appendix A to this report) could have a beneficial affect on road safety.
- 4 Unlike proposed traffic regulation orders there is no legal requirement to consult on proposed speed limit orders. However, there is a legal requirement for a local

authority to give public notice before introducing a speed limit order and this frequently results in members of the public notifying the Council of their opinions.

Discussion

50MPH SPEED LIMIT

- 5 In the three weeks following publication of proposed 50mph speed limit order, Kent County Council received 17 written opinions. These are summarised in Appendix B of this report.
- 6 The Department for Transport's national advisory document on speed limits is Circular Roads 1/06, "Setting Local Speed Limits". By adhering to the guidelines in this document, a highway authority can consistently apply the most appropriate speed limit for any stretch of road. Broadly, applying these criteria to a rural single-carriageway A-road (such as Polhill / London Road), the appropriate speed limit is likely to be:
 - 60 mph: high quality road with few bends, junctions or accesses
 - 50 mph: lower quality road which may have a relatively high number of bends, junctions or accesses
 - 40 mph: where there is high number of bends, junctions or accesses, substantial development, where there is a strong environmental or landscape reason, or where the road is used by considerable numbers of vulnerable road users (pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians).
- 7 Officers assessed Polhill as meeting the 50mph criteria by virtue of the pattern of crashes at the junction with Pilgrims Way and the loss of the climbing lane before the top of the hill. London Road between Polhill and Badgers Mount roundabout was assessed as meeting the 50mph criteria by virtue of the series of commercial accesses. The view of Kent Police is that whilst there may be a case for reducing the speed limit on Polhill, they do not agree that this is so on the 900metres of London Road between Badgers Mount roundabout and Calcutta Club restaurant. Officers advise that since the crash reduction investigation that triggered the proposed lowering of the speed limit was carried out on Polhill and not London Road it is reasonable to accede to the police advice.
- 8 Unfortunately there is not yet any statistically significant evidence in Kent that simply reducing a national speed limit to 50mph speed limit has any effect on the frequency of road traffic crashes. This is because, as in the case of Polhill, lower speed limits have until recently only been introduced in conjunction with other measures and the effect of the lower speed limit in isolation cannot be determined. However, because the extent of damage in a road traffic accident increases in proportion to the square of the vehicle speed, any reduction in vehicle speed that was achieved would reduce the severity of injury in any accident that does occur.

CYCLISTS' SAFETY

- 9 Twelve of the seventeen responses to the proposed reduction in speed limit related to the safety of cyclists on Polhill. As noted in paragraph 6, where a rural single-carriageway A-road is used by considerable numbers of vulnerable road users, a 40mph would be in accordance with Circular Roads 1/06. However, what

constitutes considerable numbers is open to interpretation; although Polhill is well used by “club” cyclists, especially at weekends, the absolute number is not high and, in the opinion of KCC officers and the police, does not warrant the lower speed limit.

- 10 Nonetheless the gradient, alignment, environment and lane arrangement do combine to pose hazards that are particular to cyclists ascending and descending Polhill. Notwithstanding this, in the three years ending October 2011 (the latest date for which verified police data is available), only one accident resulting in a cyclist being injured has been reported on this stretch of road; this occurred at the Pilgrims Way junction. This means that KCC is unable to attach sufficient priority at this time to allocate the funds necessary to carry out specific improvements to mitigate these hazards. Nevertheless, both the junction improvement at Pilgrims Way and the proposed 50mph would both assist in this respect.
- 11 Although funds are not currently allocated to additional works on Polhill, officers will continue to bear in mind the improvements that cyclists, in particular, have requested. Central to this, KCC will bear in mind the proposal that Polhill is made a single lane in each direction (with corresponding cycle lanes). This will be investigated in more detail as part of any future maintenance or improvement scheme that may be carried out. An example of a maintenance scheme that could trigger this detailed investigation would be the road requiring resurfacing and an example of a highway improvement that could enable this would be any off-site highway works that are required by virtue of any nearby development. As a note of caution, whilst converting Polhill to a single lane in each direction would lessen the risk to cyclists, more work is required to determine whether the change could result in another type of crash being more likely (eg an uphill or downhill overtaking manoeuvre).

Key Implications

Financial; Resource (non-financial); Legal etc.; Value For Money

- 12 None for Sevenoaks District Council. Kent County Council has allocated £25,000 for the crash remedial works on Polhill. The works to the junction of Pilgrims Way are forecast to cost £17,000 and the 50mph speed limit is forecast to cost £5,000 to introduce. The design, contract management and safety audit is forecast to cost £3,000.
- 13 Responsibility for enforcing a 50mph speed limit would rest with Kent Police. They are concerned that if the lower limit is not widely observed then they would be unable to resource sufficient enforcement to significantly improve compliance.

Risk Assessment Statement

- 14 None as a result of this report.

Appendices

- A Location of advertised and proposed 50mph speed limit
- B Summary of responses to Notice of Speed Limit Order

Sources of Information: None

Contact Officer: Andrew Burton, KCC Traffic & Schemes Team Leader
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Summary of Support Received

| | Comments |
|-----------------------|--|
| Sevenoaks Cycle Forum | Feel a reduction to less than 50mph would be more appropriate. |
| 11 No. individuals | |

Summary of Objections Received

| | Comments | Response to Comments |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Shoreham Parish Council | No justification for its introduction. Drivers do not respond to lower speed limits but rather to perceived hazards so this would not slow traffic down. | See paragraphs 6 and 13 of this report |
| Police | A reduction to 50mph does not comply with the Circular 01/2006. Police would consider supporting a 50mph speed limit on Polhill between the Calcutta Club and the junction with Morants Court Road but require speed data over a week period prior to making their decision. | See paragraph 6 of this report |
| Respondent No.1 | The existing national speed limit is correct. No evidence has been provided to show a lower speed limit would comply with DfT Circular 1/2006 | |
| Respondent No. 2 | Objector believes that more direct 60mph speed limit signing is required. | A signed 60mph speed limit on a single carriageway road is not permitted by national regulations |
| Respondent No. 3 | 50mph would be unenforceable. | See paragraph 13 of this report |

| | Comment | No. of people |
|----------|--|---------------|
| Comments | People drive too slowly. | 1 |
| | Re-design of the road is required with a single lane in both direction separated by a double white line and dedicated cycle lanes. | 7 |
| | More consideration for cyclists | 12 |
| | Improve Old Polhill | 1 |