

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Name of Committee Warwick Area Committee

Date of Committee 13th September 2005

Report Title A429 Coventry Road, Warwick - Possible Lowering of Speed Limit

Summary This report examines the possibility of lowering the existing 60 mph speed limit to 40 mph on the A429 Coventry Road. Warwick, from the end of the existing 40 mph limit out to the A46 junction.

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Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework? Yes/No

Background Papers Guy's Cliffe A429 Road Safety Petition and supporting text.
Letter from Warwickshire Police dated 11th August 2005.

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:- *Details to be specified*

- Other Committees Warwick Area Committee – 21st June 2005, 26th July 2005
- Local Member(s)
(With brief comments, if appropriate)
- Other Elected Members Councillor Mrs S E Boad – for information
- Cabinet Member
(Reports to The Cabinet, to be cleared with appropriate Cabinet Member)
- Chief Executive
- Legal P Endall- comments noted
K Grasby – comments noted

- Finance
- Other Chief Officers
- District Councils
- Health Authority
- Police
- Other Bodies/Individuals

FINAL DECISION **YES/NO** *(If 'No' complete Suggested Next Steps)*

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS :

Details to be specified

- Further consideration by this Committee
- To Council
- To Cabinet
- To an O & S Committee
- To an Area Committee
- Further Consultation

Warwick Area Committee - 13th September 2005

A429 Coventry Road, Warwick - Possible Lowering of Speed Limit

Report of the Director of Planning, Transport and Economic Strategy

Recommendation

That the Committee notes the report and resolves to await the publication of the revised Circular 1/93, at which time any proposed speed limit on the A429 will be reviewed.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The section of the A429 under consideration extends from just north of the roundabout at the Primrose Hill junction northwards as far as the roundabout junction with the A46.
- 1.2 There is an existing 40 mph speed limit on Coventry Road, which terminates just north of the Primrose Hill roundabout. From here, northwards out to the A46, the National 60mph limit applies.
- 1.3 At the Warwick Area Committee meeting on 21st June 2005, a petition was handed in by Leek Wootton Parish Councillor Charles Stubbs, in support of a request for a 40 mph speed limit on this length of road.
- 1.4 The request was responded to and discussed at Area Committee on 26th July, following which the Committee requested a report to its next meeting.

2. The Speed Limit Request

- 2.1 The request for the existing 60mph speed limit to be lowered was made in the form of a petition and other documents presented by Leek Wootton Parish Councillor Charles Stubbs.
- 2.2 The contents of the documents, submitted to the June and July Area Committees, have been carefully examined and considered in detail.
- 2.3 The petitioners "urgently demand that the stretch of the A429 road from the A46 roundabout south east of Leek Wootton to the roundabout just north of the BP

garage be subject to a 40 mph speed restriction to ensure the safety of customers, of visitors to and residents of the affected properties, and all other users of the road”.

- 2.4 The petitioners also claimed that it would be a simple procedure to reduce the speed limit, and that there was no need to change the environment. This claim is addressed in Section 4 below.
- 2.5 The County Council’s policy on speed limits was also questioned, as was the method of applying the Casualty Reduction budget. These issues are addressed in Sections 5 and 8 below.

3. Speed on the Road

- 3.1 The existing speed limit from the end of the 40 mph limit just north of the Primrose Hill junction roundabout out to the A46 roundabout is 60 mph.
- 3.2 The alignment of Coventry Road over this length is relatively straight, with good forward visibility throughout. There are no public road junctions along its length and thus turning traffic only occurs at a few private accesses.
- 3.3 The perception of the road to drivers is one on which they can normally maintain a steady and reasonable speed, at up to 60mph, subject to any need to slow down in heavier traffic flows.
- 3.4 A speed survey taken from 13/1/05 to 20/1/05 at a point between just south of The Saxon Mill showed the following results:-
 - (i) 24 hour two-way 85%ile speed = 52.1 mph
 - (ii) 24 hour two-way mean speed = 44.0 mph
 - (iii) AM peak two-way 85%ile speed = 47.2 mph mean = 33.8 mph
 - (iv) PM peak two-way 85%ile speed = 48.3 mph mean = 41.4 mph
- 3.5 These results show that there is excellent compliance with the existing speed limit, with only about 2% exceeding 60 mph over 24 hours. This falls to less than 2% in peak hours. There is therefore currently no significant speed limit abuse.
- 3.6 The speed data also indicates that about 68% of the daily two-way traffic is travelling at between 41 and 61 mph.
- 3.7 Thus, two-thirds of drivers currently perceive this length of road as being one on which speeds in the 41 to 61 mph range are reasonable, but only 2% feel the need to exceed 60 mph.
- 3.8 The petition claims that in the morning peak hour the Warwick bound traffic, amounting to 25% of the daily flow, is moving much slower. The average speed does indeed drop to about 30 mph. However, the proportion is about 5.5%, not 25%.

4. The Basis for Speed Limits

- 4.1 The supporting documentation to the petition details concerns of various local residents and businesses along the A429, and outlines the difficulties experienced in using this section of the road. However, it suggests that all that is needed is to “move two 40 mph signs a mile along the road and paint ‘40’ on the southbound carriageway”. Experience has shown that in this instance this would almost certainly result in a speed limit that would not be perceived as reasonable by many drivers, and it would probably fall into disrepute. In such situations, there is often a clear difference between speed limits and actual speeds.
- 4.2 The approach that is used by the County Council in setting speed limits is that they should be lowered only when a consequent reduction in vehicle speed can reasonably be expected, and also that the most important factor when setting a limit is what the road looks like to the road user. This is influenced by road geometry (road width, sightlines, bends, crossings etc) and the environment through which the road passes (rural, residential, shop frontages, schools etc). There is little point in establishing a limit, however desirable it may appear from an environmental or safety point of view, if it is not going to have any effect on actual vehicle speeds.
- 4.3 Thus, in many situations, lowering a speed limit without carrying out significant additional works to either persuade or force drivers to lower their speeds is unlikely to be successful.

5. County Council Speed Limit Policy

- 5.1 The County Council Policy on speed limits, along with Warwickshire Police, is currently based on Department of Transport (DfT) Circular Roads 1/93. This policy sets out the criteria that should be used in setting local speed limits and it follows the principles in 4.2 and 4.3 above.
- 5.2 The petition queries the use of Circular 1/93 on the grounds that, firstly, it was originally issued for guidance, and secondly that it is likely to be superseded shortly.
- 5.3 Neither of these points is directly contested. Firstly, however, the County Council specifically developed its policy on speed limits based on the guidance in Circular 1/93, in order that when matters of speed limits were being considered across the county, there would be a consistent approach. Alterations to speed limits can be extremely contentious and difficult to resolve. A clear policy is essential. The fact that other highway authorities may have slightly different policies does not mean that the Warwickshire County Council policy is incorrect.
- 5.4 The second point refers to the update to Circular 1/93, for which the draft was sent out for consultation at the end of last year. Unfortunately, the new document has not yet been issued.

6. Warwickshire Police Response

- 6.1 The County Council have worked very closely with Warwickshire Police on road safety matters for many years. Our joint approach has been to only install lower speed limits where they are both perceived by drivers as reasonable, and are largely self-enforcing in order not to increase demands on the Police.
- 6.2 Warwickshire Police have replied to our letter on the A429 issue. The following three extracts from their letter are most relevant:-
- (i) 'Taking into account the nature of the road and the sparse environmental features the present limit would seem appropriate'.
 - (ii) 'Should the limit be reduced to 40mph without substantial road engineering then the potential is for this figure (the percentage of drivers travelling at speed above the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) enforcement level) to rise to 40%, resulting in an enforcement issue'.
 - (iii) '..the Police would not object (to a 50 mph limit) although some form of engineering may need to be considered...'

7. Engineering Works

- 7.1 In line with County Council Policy, and in order to be supported by Warwickshire Police, any scheme which includes the reduction of a speed limit should be:-
- (i) Perceived by motorists as reasonable.
 - (ii) As far as possible require no additional enforcement from the Police.
- 7.2 When assessed against paragraphs 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 above, the A429 on Coventry Road is not considered to be a road on which a 40 mph speed limit would be perceived as 'reasonable' by the majority of motorists. It would be abused by a significant number of them, and the Police are unlikely to be able to offer additional enforcement.
- 7.3 A detailed scheme which might support a 40 mph speed limit has not been prepared, but an assessment of the works likely to be necessary has been made.
- 7.4 On a road such as the A429, these would usually take the form of central refuge islands at intervals along the road. Site checks have shown, however, that the existing A429 is not wide enough to allow refuge islands to be installed without local road widening. Some form of lighting would be needed to highlight the location of these refuges.
- 7.5 Estimating the costs at this stage is difficult since the presence or otherwise of services in the verge which might need to be moved would be a major factor. Even if there are no such difficult services to move, the engineering works, administrative and legal costs to install a 40mph speed limit could be of the

order of £100,000. Any required service alterations could considerably increase this estimate.

8. Recorded Injury Accidents

- 8.1 One of the principal reasons for the lowering of a speed limit to be considered is to attempt to address a significant injury accident record. The accident records show that on the A429 over this length, there have been only three recorded injury accidents in the last three years; none in 2002 or 2003, two in 2004 and one this year. In two of these, drivers were turning right into The Saxon Mill, and were hit from behind in daylight in dry weather conditions. The other involved a right turner out of The Saxon Mill, in similar weather. Recent accidents, therefore, have not taken place in the dark or poor weather conditions. Indeed, it would appear that driver error led to all three, and that excess speed was not a factor.
- 8.2 With limited funding available for safety engineering, the County Council's Policy is aimed at reducing the number of people killed or injured on Warwickshire's roads. Priority is therefore given to treating sites where there have been a number of recent collisions in which people have been injured, often due to excessive speed. Many sites have a worse accident record, and priority is given to these locations. It is therefore not appropriate to use funding from the Casualty Reduction Budget on a scheme on this road.
- 8.3 The petitioners suggest that the funding should be applied to Casualty Prevention rather than Reduction. The problem with this argument is that it implies that funding should be taken away from sites with higher accident records and diverted to sites with lower accident records. On balance, more people are then likely to continue to be killed or injured at the higher rated accident sites. It is also extremely difficult to prioritise limited spending based on estimates of accident prevention.
- 8.4 The need to progress towards the Governments Casualty Reduction targets is also questioned. The County Council have not only adopted the Government targets, but have set their own more onerous targets. Diverting funding as suggested would make these even more difficult to achieve.

9 The Revised Guidance Document

- 9.1 As stated above, the update to Circular 1/93, for which the draft was sent out for consultation at the end of last year, has unfortunately not yet been issued. At this stage it is not possible to establish conclusively what impact the proposed revision will have. In the meantime, it is considered essential that the existing speed limit policy stands. When the final document is issued, the County Council will have the opportunity to review its policy on the setting of speed limits.

10. Conclusions

10.1 To impose a speed limit of 40 mph which:-

- (i) Complies with current County Council Policy;
- (ii) Has the support of the Police;
- (iii) Would be reasonably effective;

would require a scheme costing at least £100, 000.

10.2 Funding for such a scheme is not available. As explained in paragraph 8.2, the Casualty Reduction (local safety schemes) budget has to give priority to those sites with significantly higher than average recorded injury accidents, and where a saving in such casualties could be expected if a scheme was implemented. There are many worse locations than the A429 Coventry Road.

10.3 The Council has no dedicated budget for reducing speed limits as such, unless the scheme is part of a casualty reduction scheme or the Village Speed Review, neither of which are appropriate here.

10.4 The Area Committee has an annual budget of £40,000 to be spent at their discretion on transport related schemes.

10.5 The long awaiting revision to Circular 1/93 is still not yet published. It is possible that when published it may contain amendments to the draft version. Such amendments may be relevant to any proposals for lower speed limits on the A429.

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30th August 2005