



<u>Committee and Date</u>
Environment and Services Scrutiny Committee
Monday 01 February 2016

<u>Item</u>
6
<u>Public</u>

Petition for removal of speed cushions on B5063 Wem Road, Shawbury

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1. Summary

- 1.1 This briefing note is intended to provide background information to the Environment and Services Scrutiny Committee in response to a petition received by Shropshire Council calling for removal of the speed cushions installed on the B5063 Wem Road, Shawbury, adjacent to RAF Shawbury. These speed cushions were installed as part of the 30mph speed limit extension safety scheme introduced at the site in Summer 2015.
- 1.2 The above scheme was introduced as part of a larger package of Safer Routes to School measures introduced in a number of areas around Shawbury starting in 2013. These measures were developed following concerns raised relating to the highway safety implications of the planned closure of the St Mary's Primary School located off the Wem Road on the northern fringe of Shawbury.
- 1.3 The primary concerns centred around the safety of the increased number of schoolchildren who would now be walking and cycling along the B5063 Wem Road on their school journeys to and from the soon to be amalgamated Shawbury Primary School located on Poynton Road on the southern fringe of Shawbury.
- 1.4 The two Shawbury schools, RAF Shawbury, Local Member (LM) and Parish Council (PC) therefore canvassed for an extension of the existing 30 mph speed limit on the B5063 Wem Road past the RAF camp to a point just north of the Dawson's Rough junction.

- 1.5 Within the informal and formal consultation process undertaken by Shropshire Council, officers consulted with West Mercia Constabulary (WMC) who are a statutory consultee. WMC had concerns regarding the extension of the existing 30mph limit as surveys showed that prevailing vehicle speeds were well in excess of 30mph and therefore supported the existing 40mph speed limit. They advised that they would only support the 30mph speed limit extension providing appropriate traffic calming measures were implemented to reduce speeds to a level commensurate with a self-enforcing 30mph speed limit.
- 1.6 Design options were discussed with WMC and a 30mph speed limit extension supported by a series of speed cushion traffic calming features was agreed.
- 1.7 The above safety scheme was implemented in Summer 2015 following further formal consultation with statutory consultees and other stakeholders. As part of this process, the proposals were discussed and agreed following comprehensive communications with the PC, LM, local residents and other stakeholders. This included notices and plans being placed in local shops, the library and on site. Formal plans and notices were erected on site on site for a month prior to the start of construction. No objections were received.
- 1.8 Following construction of the scheme some complaints were received by SC officers, LM and PC regarding the severity of the speed cushions and the need to slow down excessively. Some complainants also cited insufficient consultation and a subsequent lack of prior knowledge of the scheme.
- 1.9 Subsequently a petition was raised by local residents with a stated 1207 signatures (740 valid signatures) calling for the removal of the speed cushions. This is reproduced as Appendix 1.
- 1.10 In order to provide a detailed and objective response to individual complainants, monitoring of the scheme was undertaken and traffic surveys undertaken to measure vehicle speeds at the sites of the speed cushions and over the whole length of the 30mph speed limit extension. The results indicated that vehicle speeds were now well constrained in line with a self-enforcing 30mph speed limit, however not excessively so, and the results were summarised in an emailed response to complainants which is reproduced as Appendix 2.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The recommendation of this report is that the Scrutiny Committee support the retention of the existing scheme including the speed cushion traffic calming measures. Further monitoring can be undertaken should the need arise.

- 2.2 Under Part 8 of the Shropshire Council Constitution, delegated powers are given to specified Senior Officers to ratify Scrutiny Committee recommendations. In the case of this Environment and Services Report, the decision will be made by Chris Edwards, Area Director.

REPORT

3. Road Safety Policy

- 3.1 One objective of Shropshire Council's Road Safety Policy is to overcome community concerns regarding traffic speeds, according to the function, nature and use of the road (to deal with perception of danger if considered appropriate).
- 3.2 In dealing with community led concerns, Shropshire Council's Road Safety Policy enables town and parish councils to take a primary role in filtering road safety concerns generated by the local community. Members of the general public are encouraged to approach town and parish councils directly with any road safety concerns. Town and parish councils accept these concerns first and then submit those that they support (and consider there to be a level of shared community concern) to Shropshire Council.
- 3.3 Shropshire Council does not look to town and parish councils to submit desired solutions; just communication of road safety concerns i.e. issues affecting vehicle, pedestrian or cyclist safety. Traffic engineers then use expertise and a toolkit of possible measures to determine the best, and most appropriate, measure to mitigate concerns. This may not always be a speed restriction. Further information on defining an appropriate scheme is contained later in this briefing note.
- 3.4 Community led concerns must have the support of: the Shropshire Council local member, the town or parish council, West Mercia Police, and the local Shropshire Council traffic engineer if they are to be put forward for prioritisation.

4. Defining an appropriate scheme

- 4.1 In developing potential schemes, Shropshire Council traffic engineers are required to give consideration to perceived danger and agree that a perception is 'fair'. Submissions made by town and parish councils are taken as being supported by a weight of community concern.
- 4.2 Road Safety Policy framework enables Shropshire Council traffic engineers to consider what traffic management measures will best

address a defined problem taking account of road function, existing traffic and accident data and community led concerns. Further liaison is typically undertaken with key stakeholders as part of this process.

- 4.3 The Road Safety design framework is based upon a 'toolkit' of measures available for use by Shropshire Council's traffic engineers, enabling individual sites of concern to be looked at and the most appropriate traffic management intervention for that site determined. The use of speed restrictions is only one measure within the toolkit that can be used to address road safety.
- 4.4 Where a speed restriction is considered, the DfT Circular 01/2013 "Setting Local Speed Limits", is used to aid decision making. It states that speed limits should:
- be evidence-led and self-explaining;
 - seek to reinforce people's assessment of what is a safe speed to travel, and
 - encourage self-compliance.

5. B5063 Wem Road, Shawbury: Summary Report

- 5.1 Following on from the scheme design, consultation and implementation which is summarised in section 1 of this report, three surveys were undertaken in October 2015 in order to assess the effectiveness and appropriateness of the scheme.
- 5.2 The results of these surveys, combined with regular site monitoring, were used in order to provide objective responses to the complaints received relating to the appropriateness of the scheme.
- 5.3 The first two automated surveys were undertaken for a full week (Friday 9/10/15 to Thursday 15/10/15 inclusive) at 2 representative sites within the series of speed cushions. The northern site was approximately 100 metres south of the Harcourt Close junction and the southern site approximately 70 metres north of the main RAF entrance. The results are summarised as follows:

Northern site:

Northbound - Mean speeds – 22.6mph, 85th percentile speeds (the accepted traffic engineering measurement, represents the speed exceeded by 15% of vehicles) – 29.8mph.

Southbound – Mean speeds – 22.3mph, 85th percentile speeds – 28.0mph.

Southern site:

Northbound - Mean speeds – 26.4mph, 85th percentile speeds – 31.3mph.

Southbound – Mean speeds – 23.5mph, 85th percentile speeds – 28.0mph.

Approximately 60% of all vehicles travelled at 20mph or over and approximately 14% of vehicles were buses, coaches, light, medium or heavy goods vehicles.

- 5.4 In order to give an even more representative assessment of vehicle speeds, an average speed survey was then undertaken over the whole length of the new 30mph speed limit. This was carried out on 24/11/15 and the results were as follows:

Northbound - Mean speeds – 23mph, 85th percentile speeds – 29mph.
Southbound – Mean speeds – 24mph, 85th percentile speeds – 30mph.

- 5.5 The above analysis indicates that the new 30mph safety scheme delivers what the Parish Council, Local Member, RAF Shawbury, local schools and other stakeholders requested, namely a self-regulating 30mph speed limit with good compliance from motorists.
- 5.6 In order that an objective decision can be made as regards the current situation it is important to clarify the background to the development of the scheme:
- 5.7 SC officers were canvassed robustly for the scheme, the P.C. and Local Member citing the strong feelings of local residents (but in particular the RAF and the old school) in favour of a reduction in the speed limit from 40mph to 30mph. As the scheme was developed a comprehensive consultation was therefore undertaken which also gave a strong consensus in favour of it – no objections were received.
- 5.8 The Mouchel Design Engineer at the time was a Shawbury resident who attended Parish Council meetings and so SC officers had information and feedback disseminated directly from those meetings which was acted upon. Throughout this process, SC Officers and the police did highlight their concerns over the scheme and it was made clear that the police would not give approval unless the scheme was supported by traffic calming measures in order that the new speed limit was self-regulating and delivered good compliance from motorists. Based on an acceptance of this condition SC officers were directed to proceed with the scheme.
- 5.9 The detailed design of the scheme, incorporating the agreed speed cushion traffic calming measures, was therefore progressed along with the required statutory consultation. All statutory consultees, including the PC and Local Member, received copies of the plans and notices (which detailed all the scheme content including speed cushions), they were also placed in local shops, the library and on site for a period of approximately one month. Again no objections were received and the completed scheme was therefore delivered in line with demands.
- 5.10 The rationale behind the use of speed cushions was discussed during the design process. In this instance, the well proven speed reduction

effectiveness of speed cushions compared to other physical measures was a determining factor and accordingly they received the approval of the police. Other physical measures were considered and discussed (plateaus, chicanes, priority buildouts, rumble strips) however all were discounted for various reasons:

- 5.11 In the case of chicanes and priority buildouts, these are often unpopular with motorists who cite the problem of one traffic stream speeding up and rushing through the narrowing before the opposing traffic stream. This can perversely lead to increased speeds and also vehicular conflict.
- 5.12 In the case of plateaus and rumble strips these are often unpopular with motorists because they are full carriageway width and there is no opportunity to reduce the impact or vibration to the car by careful positioning (straddling). It is important to note that speed cushions allow emergency vehicles to negotiate them with care without too much disruption or discomfort which is particularly important in the case of ambulances of course. Accordingly, as has happened in the development of other schemes, it is unlikely that rumble strips or plateaus would have received the support of the emergency services.
- 5.13 The cushions used at the site are within the national design standards for a 30mph speed limit. These design standards allow a maximum height of 75mm and SC Officers authorised the use of 65mm height in this case. These cushions have been used extensively in other 30mph areas across Shropshire and indeed nationally.
- 5.14 It is important to understand of course, that any form of traffic calming will be a compromise between severity and the extent of speed reduction required. Substantial measures were required in this case in order to reduce speeds to a level commensurate with a 30mph limit. As the length of road in question is semi-rural in character with only sporadic development and few accesses, the natural speed for motorists when they are driving to the prevailing conditions is approximately 40mph. If a decision were to be made to remove or reduce the current measures then speeds will increase to around 40mph, as they were before the scheme was put in place. Experience shows us that motorists will not reduce their speed without the character of the road being changed and a signed only 30 would have poor compliance. Such an approach also leads to speed limits being brought into disrepute and would soon attract criticism from those locals and stakeholders who called for a genuine speed reduction. It would also lead to the police withdrawing their support for the scheme and no enforcement would be undertaken.

6. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

6.1 Risks

- The petition could be seen as a challenge to the procedures and decision making processes undertaken by SC officers when developing highway safety schemes. This could undermine how similar requests are dealt with by Shropshire Council in the future.
- Lack of a transparent process and inconsistencies across the County could pose a risk to the reputation of the authority.
- Pursuit of less appropriate highway measures could raise expectations at other locations. Shropshire has a diverse highway network and schemes need to be appropriate to highway function and user needs.

6.2 Opportunities

- A decision to support the recommendation of this report will reinforce the need for a consistent approach to scheme development and the use of expertise both within Shropshire Council and outside through the use of partnership organisations.
- Such an approach will develop the most appropriate intervention for a given concern within any political, technical or financial constraints.

6.3 Human Rights

- There are not considered to be any substantive human rights implications.

6.4 Equalities

- This scheme was primarily developed to address the concerns raised relating to the safety of school children and other vulnerable road users. Any decision to reduce the level of traffic calming within the scheme and therefore the effectiveness of the scheme by increasing traffic speeds would adversely impact on children and vulnerable adults. This would have implications under the Equalities Act.

7. Financial Implications

The cost of removing the speed cushions and replacing with other measures would be in the region of £10-20k depending on what measures were chosen and the funding of this would be at the expense of another capital project. If this decision was made then the speed cushions could be reused at another site at some point, thus reducing costs to some degree.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1 The monitoring and traffic surveys undertaken demonstrate that the existing scheme is effective and appropriate. Vehicle speeds have been reduced to a level commensurate with a self-enforcing 30mph speed limit which was the directive given by WMC.
- 8.2 Demonstrable local support was apparent for the scheme and appropriate informal and formal consultation with stakeholders and local residents was undertaken. No objections were received.
- 8.3 Any revisions to the scheme would undermine its effectiveness and the 30mph speed limit would cease to comply with the requirements of DfT Circular 01/2013 “Setting Local Speed Limits” (see Section 4.4). If revisions were made and speeds did increase then WMC would withdraw its support. It is highly likely that without the traffic calming features speeds would revert back to a level commensurate with a 40mph speed limit and WMC would then request the reintroduction of the former 40mph speed limit.
- 8.4 Reintroduction of the former 40mph speed limit would necessitate a new legal order (Traffic Regulation Order under the Highways Act 1980) for the 40mph limit which would require further statutory consultation. This would be likely to result in robust objections from those stakeholders who called for the introduction of the 30mph scheme, primarily RAF Shawbury and Shawbury Primary School.
- 8.5 Clearly, whatever decision is made there will be some residents and stakeholders who will be unhappy with the outcome. However, the balance of evidence substantially supports the retention of the existing scheme with the speed cushion traffic calming measures.

<p>List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• DfT Circular 01/2013 “Setting Local Speed Limits”
<p>Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)</p> <p>Simon Jones – Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport</p>
<p>Local Member</p> <p>Simon Jones</p>
<p>Appendices</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1 Petition from local residents calling for removal of speed cushions.2 Emailed response to complainants.3 Drawing No. 1047428-C-1202: Scheme Drawing