

Extract from Agenda Item 7, Appendix B North Herts JMP Report 23.4.2012

6) 20mph Restrictions in Hitchin

The panel has asked that the following roads be assessed against HCC's Speed Management Strategy to assess whether they can be signed as a 20mph Limit. For a road to be signed with a 20mph limit the 85th percentile speeds must be 25mph or less. The estimated cost of investigated the sites is £13,140. This allows for all the necessary investigation, including speed and volume counts to assess whether the road meets the criteria. If the roads require traffic calming measures to achieve the required 85th percentile speeds the cost is likely to be prohibitive for the Panel.

Stormont Road
Bearton Road
Periwinkle Lane
Water Lane
Ickleford Road
York Road*
Bunyan Road*
Dukes Lane*
Lancaster Road*
Lancaster Avenue*
Brampton Park Road*
Balmoral Road*
Florence Street*
Alexandra Road*
Kings Road*
Radcliff Road*
Dacre Road*
Old Hale Way
Strathmore Avenue

These sites have now been investigated for their suitability for a 20mph speed limit. Using the SMS, this takes into account vehicle speeds and the current environment. Of these 19 sites, 12 (highlighted *) can be considered suitable due to their existing 85th percentile speeds being below the 25mph threshold requested by HCC in their SMS.

Of these 12 sites, 2 would be suitable for 20mph zones as they contain speed reducing features so would only require signing at the terminal points of the extents. The remaining sites would be suitable for a signed 20mph limit which would require the use of terminal and repeater signs.

The SMS states that lengths of a speed limit should not be less than 400m as an absolute minimum. This is to avoid too many changes of limit along a road length. The roads here are all residential roads so to judge the suitability of a road for a 20mph limit based on length would mean the majority of residential roads would not comply. However, consideration could be given if they formed a group of roads contained within an area. These roads do not, so the case for a 20mph limit is further weakened.

The sites have been submitted to the HCC Speed Management Group for their comments as to whether it meets the criteria for a 20mph speed limit, but a response has not yet been received, though they are due to meet in early April 2012.

Informal consultation comments received from the Police shows that it is likely their official stance would be they have no objection to the proposals. However, unofficially they question the need for the limits when the speeds are already compliant with such a limit or, if not, the speeds are low enough not to justify any additional enforcement action as they are under the 35mph threshold for enforcement action.

Sites that do not meet the criteria as the existing speeds are too high would require the installation of speed reducing features which would make implementation of these prohibitively expensive.

Accident history for the sites that do meet the criteria reveal no speed related accidents within the last three years.

Bearing in mind the comments received and the results of the investigation the recommendation is not to install 20mph limits in these roads.

Should it be decided to progress these works, the estimated cost of a single site is £7,000. The estimated cost of all 12 sites is £30,000.

Extract North Herts Highways Partnership – Minutes 23 April 2012

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Members noted the report and in particular the outcomes of the feasibility studies for Vehicle Activated Signs - where only one scheme in Bedford Road, Hitchin met all the criteria. The ASM confirmed that where the criteria for a VAS was fully met then HCC would place this VAS financing into Highways Locality Budget. and 20 mph speed restrictions in certain roads in Hitchin. Comment was made as to the way forward in terms of financing such schemes and how NHDC Area Committees could have the opportunity to consider the costs and whether matched funding would be approved.

There ensued a lengthy discussion on the provision of 20 mph speed limits and two Hitchin District Members were anxious that every effort should be made to take these Hitchin roads into a grouping as the criteria of roads longer than 400 metres had not met the Speed Management Strategy. The Lead Assistant District Manager advised the JMP that these particular roads did not meet the grouping criteria but if there were gaps between roads of less than 400 metres these could still be considered subjectively. Other Members advised officers that constituents wanted 20 mph speed limits in their towns and villages and this should be considered, and a Member advised that the accident criteria was not necessarily valid as accidents in urban roads were invariably two vehicles 'coming together' without injury. The Area Service Manager (ASM) understood the concerns of Members but he had to undertake studies within the parameters of the current HCC Strategy on speed limits established in 2009. Unfortunately none of the proposed roads seemed to be suitable for core funding by the County Council and that the feasibility studies had not identified any exceptional problems. The ASM advised the JMP that initial consultation with the Police had indicated no objection, but the Police questioned the need for an imposed speed limit in the urban streets as the Police considered that speeds were compliant and the speeds were under the 35 mph threshold for enforcement.

Notwithstanding the replies made by the highways officers it was emphasised by the Hitchin Members that there must be a 20 mph enforcement in the group of roads identified and approved by the Hitchin Committee. Also that recognition should be made of the support nationally by Members of Parliament for a 20 mph speed limit in residential and urban areas and villages.

A Member enquired about the implementation of a 20 mph speed limit in Whitehorse Lane, Great Ashby and the LADM advised that as there were road humps in situ then advance notice to drivers of the speed limit via signing alone could be considered.

Another Member sought confirmation that once the JMP Discretionary Budget had migrated to Highways Locality Budget there would be arrangements made to continue the maintenance of Vehicle Activated Signs. The ASM advise that no decision had been made on this highways issue and that the 'life' of a VAS was estimated to be 10 years only and consequently costs for replacement VAS might have to be considered also.

Whilst there had been a sound debate on highway schemes to be funded next year it was clear that there remained a great deal to be done on clarification of funding streams and how Councillors would receive details of costs for highway schemes. The ASM proposed and it was agreed that Councillors should if possible put forward schemes at the next cycle of the NHDC Area Committees in July.

At the end of the debate several Members stressed the need to assess what could be achieved under the Localism Act, that the proposal within Herts Locality Budget was for all highways issues to be progressed via County Councillors, that the current policies used by HCC on highway matters should be respected and that officers had very little leeway against these policies. Financing would be via the Highways Locality Budget and decisions made at Highways Liaison Meetings, and if appropriate raise such highways matters at the HCC Transport Panel.