

Petition to reduce the speed limit on Christchurch Road, Virginia Water

Background

Christ Church Infant School, Virginia Water, is situated on Christ Church Road, a through-road between Virginia Water (and towns and villages to the south) and the A30. The current speed limit is 40 mph. The desired outcome is a reduction in the speed limit, either a permanent reduction or the introduction of a variable speed limit which is reduced to 20 mph at peak times on weekdays during term time.

Current situation for the school

On the approaches to the school are warning signs concerning the presence of a school. However, the fact that the speed limit is 40 mph (the 40 mph notice being on the same post as the school warning sign) is likely to lead drivers to assume that the school is not directly on the road and does not require especial care. Since the school is small and the front occupies an area similar to some houses on the road, it is not immediately apparent, particularly when driving from the A30 as it is beyond a bend in the road.

The school does not have a "drop off area". Being a Church school and situated away from the higher density residential areas of the village, the majority of children cannot walk to school. Most parents have to park on the road or in the car park of the parish Church. There is no pedestrian crossing, and the choice at peak times of day is to try to cross the road between parked cars or further along the road where traffic has gained even more speed. Whilst parents sign a Parking Agreement and agree to park so that children exit cars onto the near-side, this is not always possible (for instance, those with babies in car seats). It is also difficult for adults to get out of cars due to the speed of approaching traffic and the lack of visibility.

A survey of parents found that 46% had experienced damage to their cars this academic year, and the majority of parents have had "near misses" when crossing the road due to the speed of on-coming traffic. There are concerns that, if the situation is not addressed, it will not be long before there is serious injury to a child.

The school has initiated a staggered pick-up time, to alleviate parking issues. However, this does mean that the school is even less in evidence.

The School Governors are highly supportive of the petition, which was initiated with the support of Neighbourhood Specialist Officer, PC Elaine Bryant, who has worked with the school and residents on this and related issues.

Current situation for residents

Local residents on Christ Church Road and Woodside Way were informed of the petition. Following this, several new names were added to the petition, likely to be those of residents. Comments from residents were invited, but none were received.

A reduced speed limit at peak times would increase road safety when visibility is reduced due to parked cars and residents are joining the road from their drives.

Previous speed limit reviews

A speed limit review carried out by the Council in 2007 did not acknowledge the difficulties faced by parents in getting their children safely to school. Interestingly, a different report published prior to the introduction of the cycleway on the road states that, "Christchurch Road is a busy 40 mph link, and therefore significant investment is required to provide a safe cycle route along this road." Campaigners feel the children deserve the same care afforded to them by the Council.

The wider situation

Philip Hammond, Secretary of State for Transport and local MP, has been contacted concerning this issue. The Department for Transport has provided information that the Strategic Framework for Road Safety was published on 11 May 2011 and states that the Department will revise its speed limit guidance with the aim of increasing flexibility for local authorities and will include tools to enable decisions to be made. On 9 June, the Department announced a relaxation to the requirements for local authorities planning to introduce 20 mph zones.

The "20's Plenty for Us" campaign has gained much support from councils around the UK. With education, consultation, social pressure and some enforcement, authorities such as Portsmouth and Oxford have implemented a council wide default 20 mph limit for residential roads without any physical calming at all, taking advantage in the change in Department for Transport guidance which encourages lower speeds without involving physical calming.

A new study by vision scientists at Royal Holloway, University of London has measured children's ability to detect approaching cars in a road crossing scenario. At vehicle speeds faster than 20 mph, primary school age children may not be able to tell that a car is approaching. This strongly supports arguments for implementing and enforcing 20 mph speed restrictions in areas with child pedestrians. Children at Christ Church School have volunteered as subjects to aid this local research group.

Conclusion

Those supporting the petition urge the Council to reduce the speed limit on Christchurch Road between Wellington Avenue and London Road (A30) for the safety of children and local residents and other road users.

Isn't it every child's right to live where there is a 5% likelihood of dying if run over outside their school rather than an 85% chance? That's the survival difference between 20 mph and 40 mph." (Data from the Child Accident Prevention Trust).

Appendices:

1. DfT Press Release dated 9 June 2011 concerning the announcement of enabling of 20 mph schemes
2. 20's Plenty for Us Press Release, November 2010
3. Wann *et al* 2011. Reduced sensitivity to visual looming inflates the risk posed by speeding vehicles when children try to cross the road. *Psychological Science: a journal of the American Psychological Society*