



OFFICER REPORT TO LOCAL COMMITTEE

(Runnymede)

Christchurch Road, Virginia Water

Speed Limit Assessment

10 October 2011

KEY ISSUE

To report the findings of a speed limit assessment undertaken for Christchurch Road, Virginia Water.

SUMMARY

This report is for decision.

At its meeting on 27 June 2011, the Local Committee considered an e-petition asking Surrey County Council (SCC) to reduce the existing 40mph speed limit on Christchurch Road between Wellington Avenue and London Road (A30).

The Officer recommendation and Police advice to the Local Committee was that the existing 40mph speed limit was appropriate and should be retained. However, the Local Committee resolved that a variable 30mph speed limit should be introduced with immediate effect.

Since this decision went against both the Officer recommendation and Police advice it was referred to the Cabinet Member for Transport. Having reviewed the issue the Cabinet Member for Transport decided he could not endorse the Committee's resolution. He therefore referred the matter back to the Local Committee, to consider how it wishes to address the issues raised in the petition on the basis of a report from officers, a new speed survey (if appropriate) and consultation with the Police.

A speed limit assessment has therefore been undertaken in accordance with SCC's Speed Limit Policy (including a new speed survey) and this indicated 40mph to be the appropriate speed limit.

Surrey Police has also been consulted further. It has reiterated its view that the existing 40mph speed limit is appropriate and that it would not support a reduction in this limit.

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This report therefore recommends that the existing 40mph speed limit should be retained.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS

The Local Committee is asked to agree:

- (i) that the existing 40mph speed limit remains unchanged.

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Christchurch Road is a B-class road that is a through route providing a link to the A30 London Road. It is defined as a District Distributor road and carries significant volumes of traffic.
- 1.2 The speed limit along Christchurch Road is 40mph between its junction with the A30 London Road and its western junction with Station Approach. The remainder of the road is subject to a 30mph speed limit.
- 1.3 At its meeting on 27 June 2011, the Local Committee considered an e-petition asking Surrey County Council (SCC) to reduce the speed limit on Christchurch Road between Wellington Avenue and London Road (A30).
- 1.4 There are residential frontages along part of this section of road and Christchurch Infant School is located approximately midway along its length. The current speed limit is 40mph speed limit.
- 1.5 In response to the petition, the Officer Recommendation to the Committee was that the existing 40mph speed limit should be retained and no further action taken.
- 1.6 This recommendation was consistent with the advice of Surrey Police and the findings of a speed limit assessment undertaken for the same length of road in 2007. This assessment was carried out after the Committee previously received a similar petition. The results of the assessment were considered by the Local Committee at its meeting on 11 May 2007. At that time the Committee agreed that the existing 40mph speed limit should be retained.
- 1.7 However, on 27 June 2011 the Local Committee decided to reject the Officer recommendation and the advice of Surrey Police. Instead it agreed that, with immediate effect, the speed limit between the A30 London Road and Wellington Avenue be changed to a variable speed limit of 30mph within school hours, and that the wig-wag signs are adjusted to indicate this.
- 1.8 Under the scheme of delegation, the authority to endorse a new speed limit when the Local Committee is in disagreement with the Police and local Officer rests with the Cabinet Member for Transport.
- 1.9 The decision made by the Local Committee was therefore considered at the meeting of the Cabinet Member for Transport held on 12 July 2011. At that time, the Cabinet Member for Transport decided the introduction of a variable speed limit of 30mph could not be endorsed for the following reasons:
- the proposal is not supported by present SCC policy.
 - legal advice suggests that it would not be possible to introduce a variable speed limit without Secretary of State approval.
 - neither the Police nor appropriate County Council Officers had been consulted over the proposal.
 - no consideration had been given to the cost of, or funding source for, these proposed works.
- 1.10 The Cabinet Member for Transport therefore referred the matter back to the Runnymede Local Committee to consider how it wishes to address the issues raised in the petition on the basis of a report from officers, a new speed survey if appropriate and consultation with the Police. The Cabinet Member for Transport agreed to consider any further recommendation for a change in current speed

limit made by the Local Committee based on this evidence in accordance with the current policy.

- 1.11 In response to the decision made by the Cabinet Member for Transport, a further speed limit assessment has been undertaken in accordance with SCC’s Speed Limit Policy. As part of this assessment a new speed survey was carried out.

2.0 ANALYSIS

2.1 Surrey County Council’s policy for determining speed limits involves a 4-step process consisting of:

- Determining the length of road(s) to be assessed.
- Determining the “preferred speed limit” by comparing the site against a hierarchy of preferred speed limits for different categories of road.
- Comparing the “preferred limit” to existing vehicle speeds to assess the likelihood of driver compliance with the preferred limit. If existing speeds are at, close or below the “preferred limit” then changes would be considered appropriate. If existing speeds are above the “preferred limit” then either an appropriate higher limit is recommended, the existing limit retained, or speed management measures introduced to reduce speeds closer to the “preferred limit”.
- Monitoring of any limit introduced.

2.2 Any possible changes to speed limits have to be considered in close liaison with Surrey Police who are responsible for the enforcement of speed limits in Surrey.

2.3 For the purposes of determining the preferred speed limit, the policy categorises Christchurch Road as an urban road since it has a system of street lighting. Due to its strategic importance Christchurch Road is also defined as a District Distributor road. Based on these factors, the policy indicates that the preferred speed limit is 40mph. (n.b. If Christchurch Road had been categorised as a rural road then it would be a Tier 2 road and the preferred speed limit would be either 40mph or 50mph dependent upon the personal injury accident rate).

2.4 A 7-day automatic traffic count was carried out (between Christchurch School and Woodside Way) between Friday 15th July 2011 and Thursday 21 July 2011 to determine the existing vehicle speeds. The 24-hour average speeds are shown in the table below together with the average speeds for the times when school children are dropped off and picked up from the school:

	Travelling towards Callow Hill	Travelling towards London Road (A30)
24-hour average speed (7-day)	35mph	33mph
Average speed between 8am and 9am (weekdays)	30mph	26mph
Average speed between 2pm and 3pm (weekdays)	30mph	26mph

- 2.5 The average speeds shown in the table above indicate a good level of compliance with the existing 40mph speed limit.
- 2.6 Reducing a speed limit alone will not necessarily change driver behaviour, as motorists determine their speed based on the character of the road and the prevailing conditions. In the case of Christchurch Road, the speed survey data shows that the majority of drivers feel it is appropriate to travel at speeds in excess of 30mph for most of the day. As such, without continual Police enforcement, evidence suggests that if a lower speed limit was introduced it is likely to be widely disregarded. As such, it would have little value in improving road safety. Furthermore, the introduction of unrealistic speed limits could also undermine the effectiveness of, and respect for, speed limits more generally.
- 2.7 During the school drop off and pick up times there is clearly a change in conditions along Christchurch Road. However, this alone does not necessitate a reduction in speed limit. A speed limit is the maximum permitted speed and drivers should always drive to the conditions. In addition, parking outside the school at pick up/drop off times has the effect of restraining overall average vehicle speeds to below 30mph (as shown by the above speed data). As such, in reality, a change in speed limit is unlikely to have any significant impact on actual vehicle speeds over these periods.
- 2.8 Over the latest 3-year period of available data (April 2008 – March 2011) there have been no personal injury accidents over the length of Christchurch Road between the A30 London Road and Wellington Avenue.
- 2.9 With specific reference to the area near the Christchurch Infant School, Surrey County Council and Surrey Police have implemented various measures to try and influence driver behaviour and improve road safety. These include the following:
- Warning signs on high visibility yellow backing boards on both sides of the road on both approaches to the school.
 - Areas of red surfacing on the carriageway next to the warning signs to create a "gateway" effect.
 - Flashing wig-wag signs on both approaches to the school.
 - Dual display vehicle-activated sign which displays the school warning sign during the school pick up/drop off times and the "40" symbol at other times (the sign is set to trigger at a lower speed during the school pick up/drop off time).
 - Surrey Police's Casualty Reduction Officer for Runnymede has worked in partnership with pupils from the school to carry out speed enforcement on Christchurch Road as part of the School Speed Watch initiative.

3.0 CONSULTATION

- 3.1 Surrey Police has been consulted and it feels that the existing 40mph speed limit is appropriate. It does not support a reduction in the speed limit.
- 3.2 The Police also advised that a reduction in the speed limit from 40 to 30mph would mean that all repeater signs would be removed (since there is a system of street lighting). This results in an area that has no speed limit reminders and if drivers cannot fully appreciate the speed limit of the road is by its nature, then speeds could in fact rise.

4.0 FINANCIAL AND VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 If the Local Committee approves the Officer recommendation to retain the existing 40mph speed limit then no further costs would be incurred.
- 4.2 No provision has been made to fund a change in speed limit along Christchurch Road. The cost of reducing the speed limit to 30mph would be approximately £3,500).
- 4.3 For the reasons highlighted previously, a reduction in the speed limit would not be expected to result in a significant reduction in vehicle speeds (especially at school times). As such, it would have to be questioned whether such a proposal represents value for money.

5.0 EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no equalities and diversity implications arising from this report.

6.0 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Speeding traffic has been identified as a major concern for residents in Surrey Heath. SCC remains committed to working in partnership with Surrey Police to tackle issues of speeding and improving road safety through the implementation of a combination of appropriate enforcement, education and engineering measures.

7.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 A speed limit assessment has been carried out in accordance with SCC's Speed Limit Policy for the section of Christchurch Road between the A30 London Road and Wellington Avenue. This Stretch of road is currently subject to a 40mph speed limit but an e-petition has been received asking for the limit to be reduced.
- 7.2 The results of the speed limit assessment indicate 40mph to be the appropriate speed limit.
- 7.3 Surrey Police also consider the existing 40mph speed limit to be appropriate and would not support a reduction in this limit.
- 7.4 It is therefore recommended that the existing 40mph speed limit be retained.
- 7.5 If the Committee were to approve a reduced speed limit contrary to Officer recommendation then, in accordance with the new Speed Limit Policy, the decision would have to be endorsed by the Cabinet Member for Transport.

8.0 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

- 8.1 If the Local Committee approves the Officer recommendation to retain the existing 40mph speed limit then no further action is required.
- 8.2 Alternatively, if the Local Committee decides to proceed with a resolution to introduce a reduced speed limit then the decision would need to be referred to the Cabinet Member for Transport to be endorsed.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: SCC Speed Management Policy.

Response to e-petition presented to the Runnymede Local Committee at its meeting on 27 June 2011.

Report considered at the Cabinet Member for Transport Meeting held on 12 July 2011.

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