

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

LOCAL COMMITTEE (TANDRIDGE)

DATE: 12 DECEMBER 2014

SUBJECT: PETITION (Demolish Lingfields' Pinch Points)

DIVISION: LINGFIELD



SUMMARY OF ISSUE:

To consider a petition containing 1060 signatures.

“Thousands of drivers wait daily in gridlocked traffic behind Lingfields' Pinch-Points in their cars, lorries, buses, horse boxes and coaches - engines ticking over and patience wearing thin causing bad driving like speeding through hand on horn to clear a path and near-misses causing braking, skidding and loud swearing. Empty pinch-points make drivers speed to get through before oncoming traffic. Priority is bewildering, unclear and too close to bends e.g. why slow down to get out of a village?

Flood-water has been diverted and crosses the road. Surrey County Council did not let these well-known facts stop their plans, they can put pinch-points anywhere to enable new-builds. Their 'blind-eyes' attitude is costing us all several thousands of pounds in repairs every time they re-build the pinch-points, an enormous and endless expense to us as taxpayers. The pinch-points don't calm the traffic, were against police advice, are doing more harm than good and have caused the only accidents that have happened here.

Changes are expected in September: demolish the pinch-points.”

RESPONSE:

The pinch-points in Godstone Road, Lingfield were constructed in order to facilitate the development of affordable housing at Bay Trees, Godstone Road, Lingfield. They were necessary in order to provide a safe access and egress to the site. Without the pinch-points, traffic speeds will be higher and the visibility at the junction of Bay Trees and Godstone Road will be substandard.

The Local Committee agreed at the meeting on 9 December 2011 that the scheme should be monitored for a year after completion. Monitoring has been undertaken on the basis of congestion, traffic diversion, traffic speeds and recorded personal injury accidents. In practical terms, the pinch-points will have been completed for two years in December allowing for a longer monitoring period than originally envisaged. This is because the highway works in their entirety were not completed until September 2013.

Pinch-points are a common tool used across the country to manage speeds. Surrey Police have stated that 'they fail when drivers make poor decisions, but this is true for most speed counter measures'. This does not make pinch-points inherently dangerous.

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Congestion was monitored by the Parish Council at the request of the County Council but they decided not to continue with further monitoring of the scheme in March 2014. They noted that congestion was only observed at peak times and that the longest queue observed was 15 vehicles. Sat nav journey time data from the Department for Transport confirms that average journey times along Godstone Road have increased by a maximum of 23 seconds at peak times along the stretch from Lingfield Common Road to Mount Pleasant Road. This includes the effect of both the reduced speed limit and the pinch-points. Whilst drivers are experiencing some delays, this is short in duration.

The signs at the build-outs are clear and comply with both the Highway Code and the Traffic Signs Manual. A Stage Three Safety Audit was undertaken in February 2013 after the completion of the pinch-points and signing, particularly on the western approach to the western pinch-point, was improved at the expense of the developer as a result. Surrey Police were involved in the Safety Audit.

Standing and pooling water on the carriageway of Godstone Road was a problem prior to the construction of the pinch-points. The Planning Inspector that granted planning permission required the developer to extend the highway drainage to address standing water outside the Thatched Cottage. The County Council has been alerted to issues with water a number of times since the completion of the works. The Inspecting Engineer that attended on each occasion has been satisfied that this has not been due to highway drainage. In any case, excessive water on the highway has to be seen in the context of the extreme wet weather last winter.

There have been no personal injury accidents at the pinch-points and Officers are aware of two damage-only incidents, one at each of the pinch-points. The first in December 2013 at the pinch point furthest from the village resulted in a claim against the County Council which was rejected by Croydon Magistrates Court; the second in June 2014 demolished the signs on the build out closest to the village. It appeared to officers that a vehicle had driven onto the build out and then over the signs. The driver did not report the incident to the County Council.

A permanent traffic counter has been installed in Godstone Road since April 2013. The results show clearly that the speed of traffic has reduced as a consequence of the build-outs and the reduction in the speed limit.

Surrey Police have been consulted in advance of this meeting in order to gain their views on the operation of the build-outs. The comments received are as follows:

"I am aware of a large campaign to remove the installations and the fact that there is a great deal of local hostility towards them. I am also aware that my predecessor raised some concerns about the visibility when approaching the northern most buildout. In view of these facts, I would like to make the following comments.

1. One of the purposes of the buildouts was to facilitate access to the housing development. The southern buildout has served that purpose.
2. The northern buildout has been in place for over 12 months and the initial police concerns for the potential of "shunt" collisions on the approach, has not materialised.
3. The buildouts have reduced average speeds to the point whereby police enforcement is no longer required.
4. The DfT tell us that a reduction of 1mph in average speeds will reduce collisions by 5%. These buildouts have therefore reduced the potential for casualties.
5. The parish council concerns about vehicles speeding through the buildouts does not appear to be supported by the speed evidence.

6. Buildouts are a common tool used across the country to manage speeds. They fail when individual drivers make poor decisions, but this is true for most speed counter measures.

7. Concern over the potential for the overhanging cottage by the southern most buildout to be damaged by passing large vehicles appears to be unfounded. Indeed, reducing the average speeds would seem to reduce that possibility.

8. Removal of the installations would not be supported by the evidence - would return the average speeds to an unacceptable level with the potential for an increase in collisions and injuries. Surrey Police cannot support any action with those potential consequences. Therefore, I cannot support any call for the installations to be removed.

I would be very pleased to assist in any way I can to consider any potential improvements that could be made to the current arrangement. However, from a road safety perspective, a reduction in collisions and average speeds is usually how success is measured and by that definition, the installations have been successful.”

This matter is due to be discussed later at this meeting but in view of the comments from the Police and the results of the objective monitoring of the scheme, it is considered that there is no justification for its removal.

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