

Reducing traffic speeds in Church Lane Oxted

Introduction

On March 3rd 2017 we attended Tandridge Local Committee to highlight concerns regarding traffic speeds in Church Lane between the roundabout and the junction with the A25 and to request speed reducing measures for this section of road. Our submission, under Item 5--Formal Public Questions, was based on the results of a questionnaire completed by residents of Church Lane, Wheeler Avenue, Peter Avenue and Haywain.

In brief the survey showed that 95% of residents who responded considered that speeding traffic in this section of Church Lane was a serious issue. Many had observed cars appearing to travel in excess of 60mph. We drew attention to :

- the many schoolchildren and elderly people who walk along this route and congregate at bus stops
- the driveways which have concealed entrances or are on bends in the road
- the lack of a pavement for most of the carriageway on the south side
- the close proximity to Master Park used especially by children playing ball games
- and the winding, narrowed, central section of the road forcing vehicles to move into the middle of the road

It was agreed at that meeting that a speed survey should be carried out and this was performed between May 8th and 14th 2017. The survey showed that the majority of vehicles exceeded 30mph both southwestbound (55%) and northeastbound (57%). The 85th percentile average speed, an indicator required by the Department for Transport (DfT), was 37mph in both directions, well above the permitted limit. Some vehicles were recorded as travelling at speeds above 56mph confirming residents' anecdotal observations.

Decision of Surrey County Council Highways

We understand in an email from Vicki Eade dated August 16th 2017 that our request for speed reducing measures in Church Lane was rejected. We were informed that mean speeds and collision history are used to assess and prioritise requests for highway improvement schemes and that data concerning the survey, which were included as an attachment to that email, showed that mean speeds had been calculated as 31.2mph southwestbound and 31.5mph northeastbound.

We were disappointed by this outcome and believe that the decision was taken without due regard to the manner in which the survey was conducted. We also have significant concerns regarding the analysis and interpretation of the data.

Our analysis

We had hoped to obtain access to the raw data on which the average figures were calculated but a request to Axiom Traffic Ltd., who carried out the survey, was rejected.

Our concerns relate to:

- the positioning of the strips for measuring speed
- the inclusion of data from traffic recorded as travelling less than 16mph
- the lack of adequate signage indicating that a speed limit applies

The DfT website states that measurements of traffic speeds should be taken 'at the position on a road where speeds are expected to be highest' and should be 'chosen to exclude locations where external factors might restrict driver behaviour....so that estimates of the speeds of individual vehicles in free flow conditions can be produced'. We note that the strips used in the survey were placed very close to the entrances/exits to Master Park and the Royal British Legion premises, and only 45 yards from a bus stop. It is self-evident therefore that slowing vehicles entering and leaving these sites, and stopping buses, would have impeded traffic flow in both directions and significantly reduced calculated mean speeds.

In order to create a semblance of free flowing conditions we reanalysed the available data excluding all vehicles recorded as travelling at or below 16mph (which we reasonably assumed would exclude traffic impeded as detailed above). In the absence of the raw data a mathematical model was constructed to achieve the recalculation (details of the methodology can be made available on request). The results showed 85th percentile mean speeds of 38mph southwestbound and 39.1mph northeastbound. It should be noted that these speeds represent a significant underestimate of the actual mean speeds as the calculation takes no account of the velocity of vehicles slowing to allow traffic ahead to enter and leave the sites mentioned above.

The DfT website indicates that 'speed limits.....must be clearly signed.....and that great care must be taken in siting the signs to ensure that they are clearly visible to turning traffic'. The terminal sign on the northeastbound carriageway at the junction with the A25 is completely obscured by a hedge (see attached photograph). There are no repeater signs along Church Lane up to the roundabout, over a distance of one third of a mile, and no terminal signs at the junction with the roundabout.

Reference on the website is also made to the introduction of 20mph zones which 'would be particularly appropriate where there is an existing record of accidents to children.....or where concentration of pedestrians and/or cyclists exist or are anticipated' The daily presence of children in Master Park, and the incident referred to below, are especially relevant in this context.

Regrettably on September 12th 2017 a young schoolgirl pedestrian was knocked down by a taxi approaching the roundabout on Church Lane in a northeasterly direction. We do not know the speed of the vehicle concerned or the extent of any injuries but the taxi was significantly damaged with a shattered front nearside headlamp and dented bonnet (as observed by GK). Photographs of the vehicle were obtained by the police officer attending the scene and would presumably be available on request.

Conclusion

The data made available by Surrey County Council Highways demonstrates that the majority of vehicles travelling along Church Lane do so at speeds greater than 30mph. Councillor Cameron McIntosh has himself noted speeding traffic along this section of road (email to GK dated July 5th 2017). Recalculated mean 85th percentile speeds in both directions (38mph southwestbound and 39.1mph northeastbound) were significantly above the allowable limit under current police national guidelines (30mph + 10% + 2mph) and instances of speeds greater than 56mph were documented. Nearly 20% of vehicles in this survey would have been liable to prosecution if stopped by police.

The dangers of excessive speed are well known and on this particular section of road the risks are compounded by the features highlighted in the introduction above.

We believe that the accident on September 12th 2017 should be regarded as a wake up call for Surrey County Council, Tandridge District Council and the community they serve. We imagine that the burden of corporate responsibility would weigh heavily on the shoulders of Council members should there be further instances of injury, or worse still, death, along this section of road. We invite both Councils to reconsider their decision and to introduce speed reducing measures, including appropriate signage, in Church Lane as an urgent priority. The Council may also wish to consider the adoption of a 20mph zone in Oxted to include a section of Church Lane as part of the regeneration plan.

We would be happy to recalculate the mean speeds if Surrey County Council is able to obtain the raw data from Axiom Traffic Ltd. We are also happy for this submission to be more widely disseminated within the public domain.

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