

PROBLEMS CAUSED BY HGVs & OTHER LARGE VEHICLES

Guidance for Blackdown Hills Parish Councils

HGVs and other large vehicles are integral to some aspects of local life and the local economy in the Blackdown Hills, but their size can cause considerable problems on narrow country lanes.

PROBLEMS CAUSED

- + damage to properties; verges; and walls/fences/hedges as the vehicle tries to 'squeeze through'
- + damage to road surfaces (the road may not be built to take the weight of very large vehicles), and damage to the edges of the highway (large vehicles are wide!)
- + large vehicles become wedged if an already narrow road narrows further, or on sharp bends.

TYPICALLY, THIS HAPPENS BECAUSE:

- + a driver is following a non-commercial sat nav, which probably doesn't highlight narrow roads and sharp bends.
- + a driver thinks his/her chosen route looks like the shortest journey.
- + Highways Authorities and other statutory bodies (Police, BT/Openreach, Wessex Water etc) choose a narrow lane as a diversionary route when street works are taking place.

WHAT CAN A PARISH COUNCIL DO TO TRY TO STOP THIS HAPPENING?

Residents Can Help By Preparing For A Delivery

If a local resident or business is expecting a large delivery, or knows a delivery firm may use large vehicles, they can warn the company and ask them to provide smaller vehicles. The Parish Council is advised to publicise this widely.

Some examples of good practice:

Heating oil companies often ask about access and arrange their delivery vehicle accordingly.

In one parish we have seen a large removal van park in the village hall car park, with the removal company providing a smaller van to move everything from the lorry to the house.

Brief Highways Authorities (Road Closures Team) and Statutory Bodies, Before Problems Occur because of poorly thought out official diversions.

Be proactive!

Contact all these organisations to outline the problem, particularly if earlier official diversions have caused problems. Identify particular locations of concern, and suggest safer and more suitable alternatives.

Past Practical Experience. It is quite likely that even if previously 'sorted', future official diversions may 'get it wrong'. Be alert (your Parish Clerk should be notified of future closures/diversions); early contact with the organisation will, hopefully, resolve things. .

Appropriate Road Signs May Deter.

Identify narrow roads and tight corners where problems are likely to occur (and probably have already occurred), discuss these with the Highways Authority (Devon County Council or Somerset Council) – and try to reach agreement that 'Not Suitable for HGV' signs are erected in suitable locations at each end of the 'problem'. Suggested procedures for engaging with the two Highways Authorities are attached.

Try to ensure that these are the pictorial version (see below), since a driver may not have English as a first language.



If agreed, it is likely that the Highways Authority may ask the Parish Council to fund or part-fund the signs and installation.

However, remember that this sign is advisory, not mandatory – and some drivers will ignore them.

Lobby For The Use of Commercial Satnav

Join with the BHPN and many principal local authorities to urge the government to make it mandatory for commercial vehicles to use commercial sat-nav.



Be Ready to Deal With a Problem or Emergency.

In a rural area, farmers are often best placed to use tractors and other farm equipment to pull vehicles out if they are stuck. The Parish Council could talk to farmers and find out who would be willing to assist.

Keep a list and contact details (perhaps, as a minimum, with the Parish Clerk; and, if there is one, the Parish Emergencies Co-Ordinator). If farmers agree, circulate the list widely.



Blockage – a regular occurrence at Membury!

Note: it should not be assumed that a farmer will do this work without payment. They are likely to look to the driver and/or owner of the lorry for payment, but if the Parish Council is the body raising the alarm and seeking assistance it is important to establish this before any work is done.

Before taking any action to try to resolve problems of HGVs and other large vehicles using very narrow lanes with tight corners Parish Councils should ensure that all necessary statutory and regulatory requirements have been met.

SUGGESTED PARISH COUNCIL PROCEDURE FOR REQUESTING A NEW OR CHANGED 'UNSUITABLE FOR HGVs' SIGN

It is recommended that a Parish Council keep a log of all such incidents occurring.

For each incident the Parish Council should note:

- + the date and time of occurrence,
 - + the length of time the blockage lasted,
 - + any known damage to structures, verges, vegetation, or highway surface,
 - + registration number of the vehicle(s) involved, and company details (if any),
- and take photographs.

If multiple incidents occur at the same location, it is worth checking to see if it is drivers simply following a satnav, or if a particular business's vehicles are 'to blame'. If the latter, and the business is local the Parish Council should consider approaching direct and trying to negotiate a more satisfactory route.

At any stage the Parish Council may wish to report the incident(s) to Somerset Council or Devon County Council (as appropriate) as the Statutory Highways Authorities, and request a site meeting to discuss possible options:

- + It may be that an existing 'Not suitable for HGVs' sign is poorly located (not seen until a driver is committed to that particular route, and with no-where to turn);
- + it may be a sign with just the words 'Unsuitable for HGVs' (and we know from Parish Councils' experiences that HGV drivers may not have English as a first language),
- + it may be that there isn't an 'Unsuitable for HGVs' sign in that location, and the Parish Council thinks one would stop or reduce the problem(s).

Devon County Council Highways contact: (to follow)

Somerset Council Highways contact: email: TrafficManagement@somerset.gov.uk
(to allow the PC's request to be logged)

Any of the possible changes listed above may be possible, and the Parish Council should approach site meetings with a suggested solution in mind, rather than just presenting problems.

Remember, 'Unsuitable for HGVs' is not a mandatory road sign. In this cash-strapped age a Parish Council needs to be prepared to pay or part-pay for any changes or additions agreed.

BLACKDOWN HILLS PARISH NETWORK
MEMBERSHIP OPEN TO ALL PARISH COUNCILS WITH A
FULL OR PARTIAL FOOTPRINT IN THE BLACKDOWN HILLS AONB