

CONCERNS ABOUT TRAFFIC SPEEDS, AND HIGHWAY SAFETY

Guidance for Parish Councils

BACKGROUND

In the Blackdown Hills the Highways Authorities are Devon County Council and Somerset Council: in addition, Highways England have certain responsibilities for the A30/A303 (which is a trunk road).

Almost all of the rural roads are single-carriageway and are subject to the national speed limit of 60mph. On many most drivers are travelling below, sometimes significantly below, the speed limit because of the characteristics of the roads – which are narrow; with bends, junctions, and accesses; and often have poor visibility. But on longer, straighter stretches speeds are usually much faster.

Many of our villages – with a mixture of narrow roads, bends, no pavements and no or minimal street lighting, and homes opening directly on to the highway – have 30mph speed limits.

Concerns about speeding are widespread, but we acknowledge that in some areas this is simply not a problem. A couple of years ago one Parish Clerk memorably told us *“this is not a problem in our Parish, our roads don’t go anywhere”*.

IF YOU DO HAVE A PROBLEM, CONSIDER FIRST THE STATUTORY GUIDANCE

The Department for Transport Circular 01/2013, as revised in March 2024, provides a wealth of guidance about what Highways Authorities must consider when setting or amending speed limits and this is the place to start.

There is a lot to digest: it is particularly worth reading the main points from the section on ‘Rural Speed Management’ and the section on ‘Villages’. Both are reproduced in the Appendix.

But, in practice, we strongly suggest you read the whole Guidance (which is easily accessible online) before any approach to one of the Highways Authorities.

DO OUR HIGHWAYS AUTHORITIES HAVE ANY CURRENT SCHEMES FOR TACKLING SPEEDING?

+ There are no current specific schemes in Devon. For details on how Parish Councils should request changes to a speed limit and/or changes to roadside signage, go to the Devon County Council website and select 'Speeding, Speed Limits, and SCARF – Roads and transport'. Parish Councils can also highlight and discuss concerns with their local Highways Officer.

+ There are also no current specific schemes in Somerset (the 2023/24 Community Funded 20mph Scheme has now ended), but Somerset Highways advises it is content to receive and consider one-off applications from Parish Councils. Email trafficmanagement@somerset.gov.uk

DETAILING WHAT YOU BELIEVE IS THE PROBLEM IN YOUR PARISH

The starting point is to detail what the problem is, and where you believe the danger lies – eg do you believe traffic is travelling too fast along a stretch of road, do you believe traffic is disregarding road signs at junctions and crossroads, or are there particular dangers in a village?

Once you have done so:

+ keep records of any incident (most likely an accident or near-miss) which you hear about. This is most likely to be done by encouraging people to report anything they see to the Parish Clerk or a named Councillor. At any particularly dangerous spot – eg a crossroads where lots of accidents occur – it could be a local resident who details each incident. It is worth notifying the relevant Highways Authority of each traffic incident/accident/near-miss you hear about in your parish, because they are not always otherwise informed. Don't assume the Police or any other emergency service will automatically inform the Highway Authority.

+ Be aware of what the Statutory Guidance on traffic speed limits says (see above and Appendix). Whatever you plan to ask for needs to comply with this Guidance.

+ raise your concern and request, with the relevant Highways Authority – in Devon the starting point is to contact your Highways Officer: in Somerset email trafficmanagement@somerset.gov.uk. Be sure to include any background information (including any monitoring records, photographs, sketches etc) and ask for a site meeting with officers.

- + tell your Devon or Somerset Division Councillors about your request and invite them to any site meeting.
- + if the problem is traffic driving very fast when you think it is not suitable or safe to do so you may wish to contact Avon & Somerset Constabulary to discuss the possibility of roadside speed monitoring.
- + tell the BHPN when you raise your concern/request and let us know later how you get on – your experience may offer valuable information and lessons for others.

FUNDING ANY CHANGES AGREED

It is quite likely that the Highway Authority will ask you to fund or part-fund any change agreed. Be prepared for this!

Throughout this document 'Parish Council' should also be taken to read 'Town Council' or 'Parish Meeting' as necessary.

BLACKDOWN HILLS PARISH NETWORK
MEMBERSHIP OPEN TO ALL PARISHES WITH A FULL OR PARTIAL FOOTPRINT
IN, OR ADJACEWNT TO, THE BLACKDOWN HILLS NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

APPENDIX

EXTRACTS FROM THE DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT CIRCULAR 01/2013, AS REVISED IN MARCH 2024,

Rural Speed Management

- *The national speed limit on the rural road network is 60mph on single carriageway roads and 70mph on dual carriageways*
- *Rural dual carriageways with segregated junctions and facilities for vulnerable road users would generally be suitable for 70mph limits. However, a lower limit may be appropriate if, for example, a collision history indicates that this cannot be achieved safely.*
- *In 2022, 57% of road deaths in England occurred on rural roads, and 27% of road deaths occurred on single rural carriageway roads subject to the National Speed Limit of 60mph limit.*
- *The speed limit on single carriageway rural roads should take into account the history of collisions, the road's function, existing mean traffic speed, use by vulnerable road users, the road's geometry and engineering, and the road environment including the level of road-side development.*
- *It is government policy that a 30mph speed limit should be the norm in villages. It may also be appropriate to consider 20mph zones and limits in built-up village streets. But it is important to consider the safety case and to seek local support before doing so.*
- *It is recommended that the minimum length of a village speed limit should be 600m. However, traffic authorities may lower this to 400m and, in exceptional circumstances, to 300m.*

Villages

135. Fear of traffic can affect people's quality of life in villages and it is self-evident that villages should have comparable speed limits to similar roads in urban areas. It is, therefore, government policy that a 30mph speed limit should be the norm through villages.

136. It may also be appropriate to consider 20mph limits or zones in built-up village streets that are primarily residential in nature, or where pedestrian and cyclist movements are high, where there is a safety case and local support. Such limits should not, however, be considered on roads with a strategic function or where the movement of motor vehicles is the primary function.

137. [Traffic Advisory Leaflet 01/04 \(DfT, 2004\)](#) sets out policy on achieving lower speed limits in villages. It suggests that reasonable minimum criteria for

the definition of what constitutes a village, for the purpose of applying a village speed limit of 30mph, would be that there were both:

- 20 or more houses (on one or both sides of the road)
- a minimum length of 600m

138. If there are just fewer than 20 houses, traffic authorities should make extra allowance for any other important buildings, such as a church, shop or school. Where the character of a village falls outside this definition, local authorities are encouraged to use their discretion in deciding whether a lower speed limit is appropriate.

139. The criteria above should give adequate visual messages to drivers to reduce their speed. It is recommended that the minimum length for the new limit is at least 600m to avoid too many changes in speed limits along a route and to aid compliance. Traffic authorities may, however, lower this to 400m when the level of development density over this shorter length exceeds the 20 or more houses criterion and, in exceptional circumstances, to 300m.

140. In some circumstances, it might be appropriate to consider an intermediate speed limit of 40mph prior to the 30mph terminal speed limit signs at the entrance to a village, in particular, where there are outlying houses beyond the village boundary or roads with high approach speeds. For the latter, traffic authorities might also need to consider other speed management measures to support the message of the speed limit and help encourage compliance, so that no enforcement difficulties are created for the local police force. Where appropriate, such measures might include a vehicle-activated sign, centre hatching or other measures that would have the effect of narrowing or changing the nature and appearance of the road.

141. Where the speed limit commences at the village boundary, the village nameplate sign (prescribed in diagram 2402.1 of TSRGD 2016) and speed limit roundel may be mounted together. The combined sign should be located at the point where the speed limit starts and it may be helpful if drivers can see housing at the same time as the signs, reinforcing the visual message for reduced speed.

142. If there are high approach speeds to a village, or the start of the village is not obvious, village gateway treatments can also be an effective way to slow drivers down. Advice can be found in [Local transport note 1/07 Traffic Calming \(DfT, 2007\)](#) and [Traffic Advisory Leaflets 01/94 VISIP – A Summary \(DoT, 1994a\)](#) and [01/04 Village Speed Limits \(DfT, 2004\)](#).

143. In situations where the above criteria for a village are not met and there is a lesser degree of development, or where engineering measures are not practicable or cost-effective to achieve a 30mph limit, but a reduction from the national 60mph speed limit is considered appropriate, traffic authorities should consider alternative lower limits of 40mph or 50mph.

144. A recommendation to use the framework for the assessment of speed limit options on rural single carriageway roads, in place since the publication of the previous Speed Limit Circular (01/2006), is withdrawn.