

Email from Ian Milne to Neil Hickman and reply from Neil Hickman, 18 July 2009

To Neil Hickman
Derbyshire County Council, Highways

From Ian Milne
Matlock Town Council, member for Starkholmes and Riber

Cc Chris Jackson
Steve Flitter

16 July 2009

Starkholmes Road and Church Street, Matlock

Dear Neil,

Thank you for attending the meeting we had on Monday about the traffic problems on Starkholmes Road and Church Street. I have a scientific background, so I can understand your desire to obtain objective data before you take any action. However, I want to place on record my view that data on speed of traffic alone is not sufficient to identify the problems which the residents are complaining about. I also want to give a fuller account of the issues as I see them daily, than we were able to do on Monday.

Although the speed data may be objective, it must also be relevant to the issues of concern. And though we all agree that speed is an important contributory factor, on its own it is not the problem. This was illustrated to us at our meeting, when that bus passed us by unexpectedly, bringing a bit of a gasp from us all even though we were well away from the kerb on one of the wider parts of the pavement. A few yards further uphill, where the footpath is narrow, a mother with a push chair would have been in danger.

Even the most advanced speed monitoring system can only measure speed at given locations. So the whole road cannot be covered. Indeed, in our case it seems sensible to make measurements at the narrow points, but these are where traffic slows down, and on one side of the road more often than not comes to a stop, as we witnessed on Monday. Only one vehicle needs to stop of course, the other can go ploughing on at whatever speed it likes. I don't think your system can monitor for this problem. Nor can it monitor for pedestrians being endangered, through traffic passing too close, or mounting the pavement.

Speeding in excess of 30 MPH does of course take place, especially in the quiet times, through Starkholmes village itself and along the stretch by the schools.

There are other concerns which we only touched on yesterday, and which are not necessarily related to speed alone. Over the mile or so stretch from the entry to Starkholmes village to Matlock Green, there are 5 stretches of the road where 2 cars have difficulty in passing at 30 MPH, or where it is impossible for them to pass. Without exception these are at bends or humps which are blind from at least one direction at this legal speed. The first 2 of these have no footpath at all, (one of these is where house doors open directly on to the road, no buffer of dry stone walls or footpaths for them), and the others have footpaths only on one side of the road. As you know, footpaths along this road appear and disappear according to road width, and when they are on one side of the road it is because the road is narrow. The footpaths are narrow in these locations too, and 2 pedestrians can't

pass on them. The single sided footpaths also change which side of the road they are on, just at the blind spots. In the middle of this mile stretch, there are 2 schools, one infant's, and one junior's. This is the only spot in the road where there are speed bumps. But these have been engineered to be bus-friendly, making them pretty friendly to 4x4s and boy racers as well.

It beggars belief that in 2009 school-children can be exposed to the level of danger they are exposed to on this road, even in the presence of their parents or with lollipop men at crossing points. I have seen kids going down Church Street on skateboards and scooters, past the Duke William, and skating right across the road at the point where the footpath ends. Even the most unadventurous kids will let their hair down occasionally when their parents can't see them They are too young to understand the dangers.

One of your points was that these issues are not unique to this road, but are common to many villages in Derbyshire. You also gave the view that there was nothing that could be done. I disagree. Despite your views, every one of our residents has experience of traffic getting much worse since Sainsbury's was opened, so the road design associated with that development is the cause of the present problems. Moreover we all have experience of access only roads which do work, and of traffic calming schemes which do work. Some of these are not very far away, but the most effective scheme I have ever seen is in Ashted in Surrey, where a rat run has been transformed into a haven of peace, albeit with rather extreme measures.

We have been told by DCC that the Sainsbury's scheme contained money set aside specifically to address problems with traffic management, so arguments prioritising our problems against those of other Derbyshire villages do not apply. I think that it is time to use that money, and not spend effort collecting data which will be of no significance. After all, pedestrians and residents have rights as well as car users.

Ian

Reply from Hickman

Thank you for your e-mail. Your comments are noted and will be taken into account by the Traffic and Safety team who have been asked to give preliminary thought to any measures which might be both effective and acceptable

With respect to the available finance monies are most likely to be available once the Sainsbury's works are complete. As I understand it the availability of the funds relies on there being a material worsening of conditions on the surrounding network. In order for this to be established traffic counting equipment has been installed. However you will I am sure understand that exceptional conditions such as the road works which took place on the A6 must be discounted and the "new " network must be in place in total.

Despite the above it is considered most likely that funding will be available and I repeat that I have asked that preliminary consideration is given to options in advance of the full results of the traffic counts.