

County Councillor Questions for the Cabinet on 5 April 2017

Questions from Cllr Clare Sutton to the Cabinet Member for Environment, Infrastructure and Highways in relation to 20mph Zones

Question

A considerable number of residents in a particular part of my Division are concerned about vehicles travelling too fast along entirely residential roads. I think the solution to this, provided there is broad support from residents, is 20mph limits or a 20mph zone. Slower speeds mean safer streets, and better public health through active travel.

Dorset County Council policy on this (<https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/travel-dorset/roads-and-driving/road-information/traffic-management/speed-limits-and-enforcement>) boils down to the following. To get a 20 mph limit or zone:

- there has to be clear evidence of recorded collisions;
- if a traffic survey finds average speeds exceeding 24mph (that is where a 20mph limit is most required) traffic calming is required to enforce the 20mph limit;
- while at present because of the financial position there are no funds for traffic calming.

I appreciate that the financial position is unlikely to change in at least the medium term, and so the practical implication of this seems to be that there can be no new 20mph limits or zones in the County for the foreseeable future. I think this is wrong and that a practical way to make some progress would be to relax the requirement for traffic calming. I understand that the 2011 Guidance from the Department for Transport (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/3218/area-wide-authorisations-special-directions.pdf) has considerably reduced the requirement for traffic calming, in particular by designating 20mph repeater signs as traffic calming devices. Would the Council be prepared to reconsider its policy on 20mph zones and limits so that there would be some prospect of being able to proceed with these in the next few years despite our current straightened financial circumstances?

Answer

The County Council's approved policy for 20 mph limits and zones reflects the government guidelines. As the County Council adopts Department for Transport (DfT) guidelines as policy, the County Council already can make a decision to install more 20mph limits.

If the collision history and traffic speed for a road or area met the criteria for a 20mph zone to be installed, then it could be. However, analysis shows there are few sites where this is likely to be the case.

As has been suggested, financing 20mph limits and zones is an important consideration. In an ideal world, with unlimited resources, 20mph limits and zones could be delivered across a number of roads/areas that meet the criteria for a 20mph limit or zone. However, the cost of installing 20mph limits/zones are prohibitive and regrettably difficult to justify against other priorities, particularly given that the impact of 20mph limit without physical traffic calming on traffic speeds is minimal at best.

Whilst the regulations surrounding traffic calming have been relaxed to include a painted '20' roundel as a traffic calming measure, it is likely that a degree of physical traffic calming would be required for most 20mph zones in order to best achieve adherence to a 20mph zone. Without physical calming measures, broad adherence to a 20mph zone would be unlikely.

Prior to the recent relaxation of traffic calming regulations, guidance from the DfT was for physical calming measures to exist every 50m. '20' roundels can now be used within a 20mph zone to reduce the amount of physical calming measures rather than replace them entirely. As mentioned previously, physically calming measures would most likely be required in order to effectively reduce traffic speeds to 20mph. In addition, physical traffic calming measures are not universally welcomed, largely because they take away on-road parking spaces.

The principles behind 20mph limits and zones are essentially the same as that of all speed limits. DfT guidance states that speed limits should be self-enforcing. This is why part of the criteria for a signed limit is for traffic speed to be close to the proposed lower speed limit. I appreciate that this may seem counterintuitive, however evidence suggests that speed limits set artificially low are not well adhered to and result in additional issues, for example tailgating and overtaking.

In recognition of your comments regarding the revised regulations for 20mph limits/zones, I will ask that the relevant officers review the County Council Speed Limit Policy Document to make sure that it takes account of the changes.