



Cabinet – 5 December 2018

Recommendation from the Regulatory Committee meeting held on 18 October 2018

Proposed speed limit reduction on part of Preston Road, Weymouth

58 The Committee considered a report by the Service Director – Highways and Emergency Planning for a proposed change to the speed limit from 50mph to 40 mph along part of Preston Road, Weymouth. Following the advertisement of proposals, an objection had been received and, as a consequence, the Committee was now being asked to consider whether the proposed speed limit change should be implemented, as advertised.

With the aid of a visual presentation, officers described the proposal, what it entailed and why it was considered to be necessary. Photographs and plans showed the characteristics and configuration of the road at various points along its lengths; its setting within the Weymouth townscape; its relationship with the local road network; where junctions were situated - including that to the Weymouth Household Recycling Centre - and where pedestrian refuges and crossings were located. Members noted that the length under consideration was essentially straight and of generous width, which lent itself to good visibility. Speed survey data had assessed that it would be reasonable and appropriate for the speed limit to be reduced to 40mph limit. This proposal met the necessary speed limit policy criteria which the County Council had adopted.

This section of Preston Road carried significant amounts of traffic in an east/west direction into Weymouth town centre, particularly during the summer season. There had been a number of serious and fatal injury collisions on this section of road and it was considered that by reducing the speed limit could assist in reducing this and considerably benefit road safety.

Given that the amount of traffic using this road and the number and severity of recorded injury collisions experienced over that length, a reduction in the speed limit was considered to be necessary on road safety grounds and was designed to regulate or reduce the speed of traffic in a managed way to be able to readily meet the conditions of the road likely to be experienced.

In response to the advertisement of the proposals, support had been received from the County Councillor for Lodmoor, Tony Ferrari; Weymouth and Portland Borough Council and Dorset Police. Mrs Grace Dursley was supportive of the proposal, with one objection being received from Mr David Penny. This objection necessitated a decision being made by members on how to proceed.

The public were then given the opportunity to address the Committee. Grace Dursley provided her testimony at how she had been directly affected by the consequences of higher speeds along that stretch of road in the tragic loss of her husband in 2015 in a collision with a motorbike. She firmly felt that the lowering of the limit would go a long way to improving road safety so that the dangers would be lessened and reduce the chances of any other families being similarly affected.

Conversely, David Penny considered that the proposal was unnecessary and could not be justified given that analysis of the speed survey data appeared to show that there would be no benefit from such a reduction. He felt that the 40 mph limit appeared to be arbitrary and considered that there was no clear evidence or accident data to support what was being proposed. Those accidents which had occurred were as a result of significant speeding and any speed limit would not have had any

bearing on preventing them. Moreover, the way in which cars were now manufactured provided for enhanced safety features designed to improve their capability to react more readily to avoid any situations which arose. His view was that there was no basis for the reduction at this time and that the officer's opinion on the benefit of this should not be supported.

The Senior Solicitor confirmed that any recommendation made by Committee or decision taken by Cabinet had to be based on the relevant evidence contained in the report and supplemented by the officer's presentation. Whilst it was recognised that often circumstances around decisions to be made were highly emotive, should members come to a decision that was contrary to the officer's recommendation, there would have to be a need for these to be substantiated by clear and cogent reasons for coming to that decision.

The Committee were then provided with the opportunity to ask questions of the officer's presentation and officer's provided clarification in respect of the points raised. Members asked whether the fatal accident was related to excessive vehicle speeds and officers confirmed that they were. Members also asked what opportunities had been taken to assess the benefits of other traffic calming solutions as alternatives to imposing a traffic regulation order (TRO). Officers explained that whilst other means had been taken into account, these were not considered to be as effective, nor as viable, as what was being proposed. As it was, where practicable, road markings and signage were evident in indicating where hazards were most likely to be encountered. Members were assured that this stretch of road - as with other county roads - was patrolled by Dorset Police as often as practicable when it came to speed camera deployment, but it was considered that a speed limit would be the most effective. It was recognised that any limit would only be as effective as the enforcement from which it benefited and efforts would be made to ensure this was the case.

The Committee recognised that there appeared to be considerable opportunity for conflict between motorists and pedestrians over this length of road given the need to access amenities in the area and particularly during the summer season, where visitors unfamiliar with Weymouth and focused on accessing the beach as soon as they might could leave themselves particularly vulnerable. Any means of reducing such risk had to be pursued. Moreover with 30 mph limits at each end of Preston Road, any lessening of the limit gave more opportunity for controlled speeds to be maintained before these were encountered.

Although understanding the principles behind the proposals, the Chairman was of the view that the evidence presented left him with some reservations at how effective the lowering of the limit would be. In his view, it was the case that where motorists could not necessarily see the reasoning for a certain limit, this could well lead to unsafe driving practices, bringing risk with this. For that reason he felt that should a TRO be made in this instance, then it should, if at all practicable, be supplemented and complemented by other traffic calming measures such as controlled pedestrian crossings.

Whilst the Committee recognised that any traffic management measures could not necessarily eliminate illegal and inconsiderate driving behaviour, it was beholden on the County Council to do all it could to improve road safety and lessen the dangers faced on the county's roads. Given that there was a need to minimise the risk for the vulnerable road users using the road and for those accessing the amenities along its length, the Committee considered that by reducing the limit to a manageable speed was the most appropriate means of meeting that obligation. In their opinion there was enough evidence to suggest that what was being proposed was largely in line with what was being experienced on the ground and there would be benefits to be gained from reducing the speed limit, in terms of improved road safety and in minimising what risks could arise. For some members the view remained however that the speed

limit alone would not sufficiently meet the objectives of lowering traffic speeds as anticipated and asked officers to see if there were any practical means of supplementing this, if applicable. They recognised that enforcement was critical in bringing the benefits from any lower limit and all efforts should be made to prioritise this.

On that basis, given the Committee's understanding of the issues at hand, the activity taking place on, the number of traffic incidents recorded, and how this was seen to be the most suitable means of improving road safety, members considered that from what had been explained to them, what they had seen in the report and what they had heard at the meeting, they were able to recommend to Cabinet that the speed limit along this length of the Preston Road should be reduced to 40 mph. A 40mph limit on that section of road would serve to both reinforce the typical speeds being experienced and reduce those speeds which were in excess of that. On being put to the vote, the Committee recommended that the Cabinet should be asked to support the proposals, as advertised.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Mrs Dursley and Mr Penny for attending and sharing their views on the proposal.

Recommended

That having considered the objection received, Cabinet be asked to approve the proposed reduction of the 50 mph speed limit to 40 mph on part of Preston Road, Weymouth, as originally advertised.

Reason for Recommendation

The recommendation was in line with County Council policy for speed limits, which itself was adopted from Department for Transport guidance. In addition, there had been a number of collisions on this section of road in recent years which had resulted in two serious injuries and one fatality. The proposal would create an environment which would contribute towards a lowering of speed-related collisions, improve road safety and contribute towards the Corporate Aim of improving health and wellbeing.