

Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee – 25 May 2023

Agenda item 5 – Public Participation

Questions received

1. Question from Peter Mole – Fontmell Magna Community Speed Watch Coordinator

Recently when describing the numerous A roads with 20 mph speed limits the 20sPlenty southern organiser said something like:-

“If ANY A road in the UK is made for a 20mph limit it is the A350 in Fontmell Magna”. Lacking pavements, we have a serious problem which is being observed and acknowledged far afield.

Many of us who live here regret that the failure to responsibly control road safety is making the village notorious to an increasingly large audience while traffic offending gets worse and quality of life is blighted to an extent which would not be acceptable in other counties. Our roads are not fit for purpose.

Whether on foot, bicycle or horse and whatever your age or capacity we have a choice to make when using footpaths which we share with all kinds of road traffic. As unpleasant incidents and high speeds increase those who expect a normal quality of life are being deterred and let down.

When cheap, simple and popular measures with many benefits and minimal disadvantages which protect the most vulnerable have been so widely introduced across Europe and elsewhere why do Dorset Councillors feel it is acceptable to routinely expose Fontmell Magna residents to such dangerous footways?

2. Question from Andrew Davis

The A350 through Fontmell Magna is arguably the most dangerous A road for pedestrians and other venerable road users in Dorset. And yet Dorset Highways have refused our application for a 20-mph speed limit on dubious grounds. An example of the duplicity of how the current speed policy is being applied is the rejection of 20-mph because “**where the movement of motor vehicles is the primary function**” and yet the same DfT guidelines used by Dorset Highways says in section 84 states that “**...traffic authorities are able to use their powers to introduce 20-mph speed limits ...where a significant number of journeys on foot,...**”

Our village is spilt in two by the A350 and some 47 % residents surveyed say they use a car for local journeys instead of walking simply due the fear of the A350.

We are finding significant support and shared frustration from at least 12 other Town and Parish Councils that view the current Dorset speed policy not fit for purpose. The political issues that arise from this frustration will probably be best answered in May 2024.

Is the Councillor aware that according to the Department of Transport press office reports, the out-of-date 2013 Guidelines, that Dorset Highways seem weeded to, is

currently being updated to make it easier for Councils to apply a 20-mph speed limit where risk and demand from local residents justify a safer speed?

3. Question from Alice Mole

When my house was built it fronted onto a centuries old track. Today when I leave my gate for church or post-box I must step onto the carriageway of the A350 where fast vehicle drivers have visibility of about 10 yards. Many people of my age are frightened of walking along or across the road due to the exceptional level of risk. Increasing numbers, including those with children, are reporting being clipped by wing mirrors of passing cars and near misses.

I believe that when the Archbishop of Canterbury was recently fined for speeding in a 20 mph zone it was for 25mph on a straight and level, busy A road with excellent visibility and wide pavements on both sides. Here we have no pavements on a narrow road with sharp, blind bends which people who live here have used as a footpath since time immemorial. Now we use it with considerable anxiety, resort to using the car or stay at home.

Speeding vehicles have been allowed to push us aside like a magpie laying unwelcome eggs in the nest of an unwitting host.

The transition from footpath to shared use has not been responsibly handled by Dorset Council and the new policy as it is being applied continues the negligence. We have asked Councillors for the sort of simple controls which have been adopted widely elsewhere for many years and these are now being refused despite the evidence.

In Lambeth pedestrians using A roads do so in safety why do Dorset Councillors feel those of us who have to walk on the A350 in Fontmell Magna should do so in such needless danger?

4. Question from David Frankl

Many studies have shown that driving at 20mph produces less pollution than when driving at 30mph and also reduces the number and severity of accidents. The Dorset Council policy on 20mph speed limits thwarts attempts by residents and Town and Parish Councils by imposing criteria that are not included in any DfT guidance, such as a requirement to have a Community Speedwatch in place.

Why does Dorset Council not actively promote 20mph as a default driving speed in areas where people and vehicular traffic mix?

5. Question from Fontmell Magna Parish Council

We were dismayed and shocked to have our application turned down. Dorset Councillors are not honouring the obligation to create a safe road environment which is fit for purpose and to FULLY take into account the composition of road users including quality of life and the needs of vulnerable road users.

With overwhelming support for our application from those who live here and no identified third-party objecting to our wishes this is a curious day for democracy in local government.

The rejection letter received loosely mentions reasons which we do not believe stand up to informed scrutiny or justify the continuation of dangerously high traffic speeds on roads without pavements where we would expect to safely walk or ride. Sadly, over time, our roads have not been adequately engineered or otherwise controlled to maintain normally accepted levels of safety.

Recently the National Organiser of the 20sPlenty group said words to the effect that, with more than 100 local authorities in the UK, “no local authority throws up more barriers to safe speeds than Dorset.” The Dorset policy as applied appears to maintain our position as the slowest ship in the convoy when it comes to bringing our road regulation into line with modern standards.

An explanation for unsuccessful applicants has been promised and we look forward to arranging that part of the new process. We have alarming and deteriorating road safety information which has been shared with Dorset Highways and Councillors. Levels of speed offending have become many times higher than the average for the county, on roads with unsuitably high-speed limits in place, and which are notoriously not fit for purpose. Our unique situation of not having pavements can be made safer with cheap and effective traffic speed controls similar to those which have been widely introduced across most of the Western world in recent years.

Why do Dorset Councillors feel that, in ignoring our wishes, it is reasonable for too many residents of Fontmell Magna to be frightened to cross the road to visit their neighbours, walk their dogs or do normal everyday activities on footways in the village?

6. Question from Dilys Gartside – 20’s Plenty for Dorset Campaign Coordinator

May I know the number of schemes which have been approved for implementation by DC under its current policy and how many of them include an A or B road.

Statements received

1. Statement from Robert McCurrach

My wife and I live in Fontmell Magna, and every day we cross the A350 (Lurmer Street) from Mill Street into Crown Hill, to access the village.

The amount of traffic, small large and very large, has increased over the years, as has the speed at which vehicles come round the bend in either direction. The distance from the crossroad to the corner, in both directions, is such that there is very limited time to see vehicles approaching. When these vehicles are coming fast, that time is even more limited. As we both have hearing aids, we cannot rely on the sound of approaching traffic, nor can we run across the road.

On other occasions we visit neighbours who live along Lurmer Street, and to reach them on foot we have to walk along sections of the road where there is no pavement, and virtually no space between a wall on one side and a hedge on the other, so we, like other pedestrians, have no option but to walk on the carriageway.

We appreciate that rerouting the A350 represents a very major step, but there is a short term solution – a 20 MPH speed limit on the A350 through Fontmell Magna. This solution has been used effectively in other locations.

We should like the Committee to take the necessary steps to impose a 20 MPH speed limit on the A350 through Fontmell Magna – before somebody dies.

2. Statement from Michael Hobbs

I was very surprised to hear that Fontmell Magna's application for 20 mph speed limit on the A350 had been turned down. As a resident of 21 years, who has to cross the A350 on a regular basis I am only too aware of the increased dangers, so now I am having to increasingly use my car. The speed at which much of the traffic passes through the village has dramatically increased in the last year as has the number of near misses.

Observing other rural areas where 20 mph limits have been introduced, traffic does respect the reduced speed limits to the benefit of their residents.

You will be aware from the information the village have supplied you with that the recorded speeds in the village are increasing at an alarming rate. With an increased village population the chance of a nasty accident involving an injury to a resident has also increased. As a responsible village we are doing everything in our power to prevent this happening. However Dorset Council seem to be able to dismiss this as being unimportant. How are Dorset Council going to dramatically improve the safety on the A350 through our village ?

3. Statement from M & F Turnball

As new residents of Spring Meadows estate we are appalled and outraged by the attitude of Dorset Highways in regard to road safety and excessive speeding of vehicles and motorcycles along the A350, especially along the new junction created for Spring Meadows. The feedback from them appears to be to allow accidents to happen before taking remedial action.

The speed limit through Sutton Waldron is 30mph and then on the very straight road towards Fontmell Magna changes to 40mph, a very short distance and then reverts to 30mph, why can the 40mph not be changed to 30mph all the way along this piece of road?

The new junction has increased the hazard along the A350 as with the widening of the road is allowing speeding vehicles and motorcycles to overtake which is dangerous. There has been no provision for cyclists along this road and no pavements for walkers who choose to walk along the road to the village and not through Spring Meadows. The junction will shortly be used by parents taking their children to school as a school drop off car park has been created in Spring Meadows

and this will make this junction even more dangerous. Due to drivers overtaking and the creation of the junction solid white lines are needed to help prevent this, in addition a permanent speed camera needs to be installed and would help the problem of speeding through the village itself also which has recently had the 20mph limit refused. We understand the Developers Pennyfarthing will be paying the Dorset Highways over £350,000 so why can't this money go towards paying for these much-needed safety issues? We feel no consideration has been taken by Highways with regards to the new junction and prevention is better than cure, so action needs to be taken now. There have already been several incidents and near misses since January which have been logged and reported to the Police and Parish Council / Speed Watch and yet still no action has been taken or acknowledged. Whenever the SID is removed which is frequent, there is an instant increase in the speed of vehicles which proves that a fixed speed camera could and would be the solution. The Highways response we had was that more surveys were to be carried out and signage on the road, how many more surveys are needed? We need action not signs and surveys.