

SONNING COMMON NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN TRAFFIC TASK GROUP

SCOPE

The traffic task group consists of Craig Henderson, Anne Symons, Ann Dayton and Fiona Cummins.

This is an early report comprising of an initial outline of problem areas and potential solutions. Input has been from the group members and from the public open days in the Village Hall, where a traffic consultant was also present, and the village survey.

We acknowledge that the task group is not a perfect representation of the village in its composition, for example, the north side of the village is not represented.

- Access to Blounts Court Road has not yet been considered in detail. If proposed residential developments are to be considered in that area, then the traffic group shall undertake to analyse traffic flow and access in this area.
- Footpaths have yet to be considered.

SUMMARY

The group believe a good method of improving life in the village and solving the traffic problems that affect our everyday lives is to engender a community culture of responsible and considerate use of highways, and to encourage residents to be cooperative to better the village experience for pedestrians and drivers alike.

We understand that while Sonning Common does not have a quintessential village centre comprising a church and village green, it does have an important village centre that serves the practical needs of the residents of our village and many surrounding villages. What happens in the centre of the village affects the entire village.

It has become clear from our work talking to residents that there is a clear will to reclaim the village from car drivers and to make the village more pedestrian and cycle friendly.

BUS SERVICE

Reading Buses have suggested that the traffic problems in the centre of the village may cause the withdrawal of the bus service from the area. If this happened, there would be no buses running up Kennylands Road or Wood Lane, and all buses to the village would be restricted to the Peppard Road.

Many village residents rely on the bus service, and the accessibility of the service on its current route. A bus service along Peppard Road only would have a very significant impact on the lives of many people who rely on the bus service for their independence.

It is reported that the Village Centre car park is sometimes used by car drivers from Nettlebed and elsewhere as a safe and free place to leave the car while they take the bus into Reading.

Introduce time-limited parking for the village car park.

The time limit should be long enough not to discourage shoppers, village hall visitors and other genuine users, but short enough to prevent abuse. The presence of a restriction will also provoke a sense of responsibility in using the car park.

PARKING

Car Parking is an acknowledged problem area for the village. There is a perceived lack of parking in the village centre. Inconsiderate and illegal parking is widespread. The main village car park behind the supermarket has recently been renovated and extended to provide an improved parking facility.

Marked parking bays

The village centre has a number of areas for parking which are underutilised because drivers do not know how to park to optimise the space to get more cars parked. We have identified four areas where marked parking bays would facilitate orderly parking and ensure more spaces were available:

- The parking bay in Wood Lane outside the charity shop and Davis Tate
- The three pull-in areas at One Stop, the Chemist and Occasions.

Car parking on the pavement is a particular problem in many areas of the village, causing

- inconvenience to pedestrians, especially those with push chairs, wheelchair users, and visually impaired pedestrians; and
- damage to curb stones and pavement surfaces where they are not constructed to support the weight of vehicles

Enforcement

There are many persistent offenders who regularly park on the same pavement. It would be very easy to eliminate these.

Illegal parking on yellow lines and over domestic driveways is commonplace. Increasingly, inconsiderate parking on opposite sides of the road in many village streets create slaloms which are difficult for larger vehicles to navigate and could be a hazard to emergency vehicle access.

Enforcement

Again, could solve this problem.

Parking on the B481 Peppard Road outside the shops causes severe congestion, particularly during peak hours.

Proposal

This parking is mainly short-term parking for drivers to visit the shops. The pavement alongside the shops is very wide and could accommodate a parking layby for use by drivers. Proposal to reconfigure the pavement to install a layby with marked parking bays and a restricted waiting time. No-waiting double-yellow lines to be introduced to the B481 between Josey Close and Sedgewell Road.

A lot (anecdotally, no survey has been conducted) of households in the village have off-road parking spaces for cars, but still park on the road, or pavement. This unnecessarily contributes to the congestion and parking problems. Garages are often used for storage rather than housing vehicles.

Parking problems are particularly bad at school times; morning and afternoon.

- Traffic from the primary school severely affects Grove Road, Lea Road, Elm Court and Westleigh Drive
- Reades Lane is affected by Chiltern Edge School traffic.

The group understands that these problems cannot be solved by legislation or enforcement. However, a community culture of responsible and considerate parking and use of highways can encourage households to park off the roads where possible.

VEHICLE TRAFFIC

The arterial routes through the village are Kennylands Road and Peppard Road, both running North/South. Peppard Road is the main B481 classified road from Caversham and Reading up through Wallingford to the northbound M40. Kennylands Road carries traffic from the south side of the village (from Emmer Green & Reading) to Chiltern Edge School in Reades Lane, and out to the A4074 via Gallowstree Common and Cane End.

Both of these roads can be very busy, particularly at peak rush hour, and in the case of Kennylands Road, around school times, and both suffer considerably from speeding vehicles.

READES LANE

Reades Lane is narrow and winding, especially approaching Chiltern Edge School. Outside the school, the grass verges are eroded where vehicles drive on them as they try to pass other vehicles, particularly buses and coaches leaving the school.

There are many areas along Reades Lane where the grass verges could be replaced by pull-in bays for dropping off school children, or used to widen the road and install cycle lanes.

SPEED LIMITS AND SIGNAGE

The Peppard Road alternates between 30 mph and 40 mph limits along the entire length of the village. Vehicles exceeding the mandatory speed limit are an acknowledged problem, and cars respecting the speed limit are often overtaken by speeding vehicles, particularly travelling northbound from the Bird In Hand public house.

Vehicle-reacting illuminated speed warning signs are installed in both directions. The newly installed south-bound sign is obscured by a pre-existing tree, and when reported to the Parish Council, the response was to request the County Council to cut back the tree. This suggests a lack of considered planning in appropriate positioning of the sign.

Connecting Peppard Road and Kennylands Road through the centre of the village, Wood Lane is a problem area of congestion and some inappropriate speeds at the Kennylands Road end. Wood Lane was the top-rated village road perceived to be dangerous by residents taking part in the village survey.

In considering speed reduction schemes, it is important to be aware of the side-effects and negative consequences.

Village Boundary Markers

Marking the village boundary along the major roads through the village can be effective in raising drivers' awareness that the road conditions are changing. Signage welcoming careful drivers, speed restriction indicators, gates on the grass verge and road markings including a temporary change in road surface and a painted pinch-point can all be indicators to drivers to reduce speed and be aware of urban hazards.

This scheme is used widely. Pictured is an example from another Oxfordshire village, Brightwell-cum-Sotwell.



Speed Ramps

Speed ramps can be effective in speed reduction, but emit noise from vehicles passing over them, which will be to the detriment of the quality of life of those living nearby.

It is thought that long low speed ramps, as used in Pound Lane, Sonning (pictured) are less damaging for vehicles and less noisy than traditional *sleeping policeman* style ramps.



Pinch Points

Pinch Points are an extreme form of traffic calming which is not thought to be appropriate for our village. They are unattractive and a nuisance to vehicles, and increase vehicle noise as motorists accelerate after the pinch point.

Pictured is a scheme in Lowfield Road, Emmer Green.



Speed limit repeater signs

Small speed limit signs to remind drivers of the speed limit are useful, particularly in Kennylands Road and the B481 Peppard Road where there is no street lighting, which would otherwise be an indication to traffic to drive more slowly.

20 mph zones

Wood Lane is an arterial route connecting Kennylands Road at the north end with the B481 Peppard Road. This road also runs through the centre of the village and is congested much of the day. Speeding can be a problem at the Kennylands Road end, which makes crossing the road difficult. We suggest a 20mph speed limit zone along the length of Wood Lane.

Grove Road is the busiest road for primary school traffic. A marked 20 mph speed limit would draw drivers' attention to the particular hazard of the road.

Westleigh Drive is increasingly being used as a short cut *rat-run* between Kennylands Road and B481 Peppard Road. As a residential street with parked cars and pedestrians, this road can be dangerous with these vehicles. A 20 mph speed limit along Westleigh Drive is appropriate for the road conditions and will discourage drivers from using the road as a short-cut.

DELIVERY VEHICLES

Delivery vehicles are clearly necessary for supplying the crucial shops and businesses in the village, but do cause a lot of congestion and hazards when they deliver at busy times. The size of the vehicles used are not proportionate to the size of the store, or the area to which they deliver. It would be desirable, but unreasonable, to expect suppliers and retailers to change the delivery vehicles to reduce the impact on our village.

To reduce the congestion and hazard, we propose to introduce time restrictions on deliveries. Deliveries could be banned during peak times when the village is already busy, and this will help to reduce the peak time congestion and spread the traffic over a more prolonged period.

It is understood that there was a condition on planning consent for the Vauxhall Garage that their deliveries should be unloaded off of the main road. This is not observed, and car-transporter lorries often park outside the garage to be loaded and unloaded, causing a hazard.

CYCLING AND PEDESTRIANS

The B481 south towards Emmer Green is a dangerous road for cyclists and pedestrians as there is no pavement. An interest has been expressed for dedicated cycle lanes into Caversham, however, it is unclear where a safe road could be made for this.

There is no pavement on Kennylands Road south of Essex Way, although there are houses to which people need pedestrian access. The new development at the southern junction of Kennylands Road and the B481 increases the potential for pedestrian traffic along this busy road.

There is a grass verge down to Number 112 which could be used to install a pavement; or

Improve access to the Millennium Field at the north side adjacent to the Abbey Crest Nursing Home, and use the existing field footpath to provide access to Kennylands Road. Existing access points will need improving as they dangerously step directly onto the road.

WALKING BUS

Congestion around the Primary School could be dramatically reduced by the introduction of a *walking bus* (<http://www.walkingschoolbus.org/>). A walking school bus is a group of children walking to school with one or more adults in a route with meeting points, a timetable and a regularly rotated schedule of trained volunteers. Walking buses are popular with children and makes life easier for parents and local residents.

When the original Community Plan was produced, the Herb Farm had agreed to allow their car park to be used as a safe meeting place from which the children could walk to school. This is a very sensible site as it is accessible from the main road and provides a safe area away from traffic for children to congregate. A Walking Bus is typically organised by the school or the PTA of a school, and is not a matter for the local council. However, support and incentives could be provided.

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH REQUIRED

Many local people drive to the village centre. Why is this and what can be done to discourage them?

CONCLUSIONS

This is an interim report of the issues that the group have discovered and discussed, with some preliminary suggestions on how the issues may be addressed. Further work will refine the proposals and result in a more focussed list. Further work will also consider traffic relating to proposed housing developments when the housing task group have reported their findings.

Many of the problems that have been identified are a result of unlawful behaviour by motorists. These can be solved today with better enforcement of highways laws, particularly in inconsiderate parking; on pavements, blocking domestic driveways and parking opposite other vehicles causing slaloms with restricted access.