

Whitchurch-on-Thames Village Plan

Report of Traffic, Roads and Pavements Study Group

10 October 2008

BACKGROUND

The study group, consisting of Harry Butterworth, Peter Hawley, Adrian Dixon and Richard Wingfield has met six times since April 2008. Village residents made many comments on the topics covered by the group at the Art & Craft Exhibition in November 2007 and at the New Year Party in January 2008. A study of those comments enabled appropriate questions to be drafted in the village questionnaire, which was responded to by 460 residents aged 16 and over. The results of this survey are reviewed here, followed by a summary of options for achieving the wishes of residents, leading to a proposed action plan.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Key finding

In answer to Q46, *'What would you most like to see in Whitchurch? – tick your top three priorities'*, the highest priority among the 452 respondents was given to traffic calming measures (57%), exceeding by a substantial margin the next priorities (new village hall, more river access, flower planting and extended cricket field use, all between 40% and 32%).

Traffic speed

In answer to Q33, asking residents whether they *'agree that traffic speed is a problem in Whitchurch'*, 85% of the 448 respondents agreed that it was a problem, confirming the many comments made on Post-it notes at the earlier events.

In Q34 those who regarded it as a problem were asked to indicate *'where you consider the problem to be most serious'*. The results were:

	High Street	Hardwick Road	Eastfield Lane	Manor Road
Percentage of <u>all</u> respondents rating the road as 'most serious'	92	53	19	6
Percentage of <u>residents of each road</u> rating their road as 'most serious'	98	84	60	22

This result shows the need for traffic calming measures to be felt most strongly for the High Street, then for Hardwick Road and then for Eastfield Lane. For Manor Road there is a lower degree of concern.

The OCC has expressed doubt that there are many cars speeding above the 30mph limit. The PC has been promised a repeat survey of speeds, in case the first survey failed to reflect the problem. Some believe that where the High Street is contained between walls the perception of speed is heightened and even 25 mph may seem excessive to pedestrians on narrow pavements.

Traffic calming measures

In Q35 residents were asked 'If you think that traffic speed is a problem, which of these traffic calming measures would you consider appropriate, particularly for the road where you live?' The results in percentages from 392 respondents were:

Measure considered appropriate	Percentages of					
	All residents	High Street residents	Hardwick Road residents	Eastfield Lane residents	Manor Road residents	Swanston Field residents
Speed indicator devices	60	59	64	60	60	67
20 mph speed limit	56	64	44	71	58	41
Better signs / marking	27	28	31	21	20	35
Speed bumps / ramps	21	18	30	7	21	20

This result indicates that speed indicator devices (or vehicle speed activated devices) and 20 mph speed limits are both widely popular measures, with less confidence shown in improvements in signage and limited enthusiasm for the introduction of physical features on road surfaces.

Respondents in Eastfield Lane particularly favoured a 20 mph limit and lacked enthusiasm for speed humps. Speed humps are more favoured by Hardwick Road residents than others. This may reflect the greater distance of houses from the road in Hardwick Road than in Eastfield Lane.

Suggestions were also made for better enforcement of existing limits in the village by such means as police-operated roving speed cameras.

Pedestrian facilities

Residents were asked in Q32 'Do you ever feel uncomfortable or unsafe as a pedestrian for any of the following reasons? (Please select all that apply)'

Of the 448 respondents, only 16% indicated that they felt safe. Of the remaining 84%, almost all cited traffic speed as a reason. Other results were:

- Narrowness/absence of pavements 67%
- Uneven surfaces of pavements 43%

Further reasons given were parked cars on the pavement, uneven road surfaces, puddles, overhanging hedges, lack of crossing points. One respondent suggested a zebra crossing at the toll bridge.

Concern at narrowness/absence of pavements was well spread across the age groups, but greatest for those aged 30-45. Concern at uneven surfaces was greatest among the over-75s.

Pavement in Eastfield Lane

Q37 asked 'Do you think we need a pavement along Eastfield lane?' The results were:

	All residents	Residents of Eastfield Lane
Yes	21%	17%
No	49%	64%
Don't know	23%	6%

It is apparent that village residents who favour a pavement are in a minority. Among residents of the road itself there is less enthusiasm for a pavement and considerable opposition to the idea.

Cycling

Q36 asked: 'Do you think cycling is safe through Whitchurch?' Of the 450 respondents, 156 indicated that they did not cycle. Of the remaining 302, 60% thought it was reasonably safe and 40% thought it was not safe enough.

This result indicates a considerable degree of concern about the safety of cycling in the village, though a majority of cyclists appear to find the situation acceptable.

OPTIONS FOR ACTION

Traffic Calming

The group held a meeting with Peter Ronald, Area Traffic Engineer of Oxfordshire County Council, on 9 July 2008, at which traffic calming in Whitchurch was discussed. A note of the discussion is available.

Key points made by the OCC engineer (his own opinions and not necessarily the Council's) were:

- Speed cameras are not fundable in the absence of an accident history
- Vehicle-activated speed limit warning devices are under discussion already with the Parish Council, for the High Street and for Hardwick Road; the next steps being a speed survey for both roads and decisions on location.
- 20mph limits will not be enforced by police unless they are accompanied by engineering measures such as humps, chicanes, narrows, etc.
- A case could be made for a 20mph limit in the High Street, in view of the three existing squeeze points.
- A 20mph limit could also be envisaged in Hardwick Road and Eastfield Lane, in both of which the school is a factor, whether accompanied by speed bumps or not.
- Modern speed humps are quieter than earlier ones. Speed cushions (straddled by car wheels) are an alternative.
- Removal of the central white line in the High Street would probably have the effect of slowing traffic speeds.

The introduction of an additional squeeze point, to slow High Street traffic midway between the two narrows, by installing a 'fried egg' type mini-roundabout at the Manor Road junction was subsequently proposed by the group and is felt to merit further investigation.

Pavements

The historic layout of the village does not permit pedestrian pavements throughout. The closeness of houses or their boundary walls on opposite sides of the road has created several difficult areas:

1. High Street upper narrows. Virtual pavement (faded painted stripes, no kerb) on west side. Improvement should be sought for safety of pedestrians, including users of the Thames Path who emerge from a rural lane into a dangerous spot.
2. Hardwick Road western end. No pavement, real or virtual, for a length of 100 metres. Situation is complicated by parking of residents' cars and driveway openings. No obvious solution.
3. Eastfield Lane western end. No pavement, real or virtual, through a very narrow stretch. Solid pavement not feasible. No obvious solution.
4. High Street lower narrows. Single pavement confines pedestrians to the eastern side. A solid pavement should be sought for the length of the Ferryboat car park, with an opening left for cars.
5. Toll bridge booth. Single pavement confines pedestrians to the eastern side and tapers to nothing. No defined crossing point.

Relocation of pavement on bridge

The discontinuities of pavements along the High Street (B471) are such that someone walking to Pangbourne from the junction with Hardwick Road has to cross it four times: first, over to the west side below the shop, then back again to the east side at the Greyhound, then across to the west side again after the toll booth, then finally across again in Pangbourne before going through the railway bridge.

The number of crossings on this route could be halved when the bridge is reconstructed in 2013 by moving the pavement on the bridge across to the east side. This would also bring closer the access from Whitchurch to the Thames meadow, directly down steps near the river bank. However, there would be a need to create a pavement along the east side of the Pangbourne embankment, ownership of which (Bridge Company or Local Authority) is unclear. Further, those walking to the station or the surgery would still have to cross the road, and the outlook for pedestrians on the bridge would be towards the river downstream instead of the mill, lock and surgery as at present.

Village Centre Project

A project to improve pedestrian safety, give focus to the village's riverside location and improve the view to the river, has been developed jointly by members of the Traffic Roads and Pavements study group and the Housing and Environment study group, building on Peter Hawley's vision. This would provide safer conditions for pedestrians near the toll booth by providing defined road crossings.

Bridge toll

Whitchurch residents used to benefit from a reduced bridge toll. The disappearance of the discount several years ago has probably contributed to a deterioration in attitudes in the village towards the unique bridge. Responding to Q44, 411 residents agreed *'that Whitchurch residents should have a greater discount than non-residents of the village'*, with 14 against and 29 neutral. The bridge company should be urged to re-instate the favourable treatment of the village.

Access to Pangbourne during bridge closure

It is understood that for the bridge reconstruction period of several months, scheduled for 2013, the Bridge Company is planning a pedestrian ferry service. Access to Pangbourne is an assumption of daily life for most residents and the company should be urged to provide a footbridge throughout the reconstruction period.

If the Mill–Lock–Weir route across the river could be opened up for pedestrians during this period it would be of benefit to all but it appears that the legal obstacles may be too challenging. This merits investigation. Safety of the route would need review.

Any ferry would need safe landing points on both banks and an opportunity could arise for the bridge company to provide a permanently useful facility.

Road crossing near Pangbourne Station

Whitchurch pedestrians taking the short cut to the train are obliged to cross a busy road without adequate visibility as they approach the station. This is a dangerous crossing, a fact that may be of little concern to the Pangbourne and Berkshire local authorities but is of considerable concern to us. The authorities should be urged to provide a safe crossing.

Primary School Travel Plan

The study group obtained a copy of the School Travel Plan (version 1.3) which indicates concerns to minimise school traffic using Eastfield lane and to improve safety both there and at the 'park and stride' site on Hardwick Road. These concerns, which affect many people living outside the village whose views were not sampled by the questionnaire, have been considered here.

Action Plan for Traffic, Roads and Pavements Issues

	Objective	Action	Time scale	Potential partners
1	Traffic calming	Conduct traffic speed re-survey	Already in hand	OCC
2	Ditto	Install speed-activated devices in High St and Hardwick Rd	Already requested	OCC
3	Ditto	Press for more enforcement of existing speed limit	Short	Tham Val Police
4	Ditto	Introduce a 20mph limit in village, in conjunction with physical road measures where necessary	Medium	OCC
5	Ditto	Investigate installing mini-roundabout at Manor Rd junction	Medium	OCC
6	Ditto	Remove central white lines	Medium	OCC
7	Pedestrian pavements	Improve upper narrows by re-marking road	Short	OCC
8	Ditto	Improve upper narrows by providing solid pavement	Medium	OCC
9	Ditto	Improve lower narrows – provide solid pavement, leaving opening to pub car park	Short	OCC
10	Ditto	Improve toll booth vicinity– provide crossing areas on both sides of toll booth	Short	Bridge Co
11	Ditto	Investigate relocating bridge pavement on downstream side	Medium	Bridge Co/ Pang PC
12	Ditto	Widen pavements of substandard width	Medium	OCC
13	Miscellaneous	Pursue Pangbourne authorities to improve dangerous road crossing close to station	Short	Pang PC/ Berks CC
14	Ditto	Make accident black spot bends at top of hill safer	Short	OCC
15	Ditto	Press for reduced bridge toll for Whitchurch residents	Short	Bridge Company
16	Ditto	Ensure plans for temporary river crossing are adequate	Medium	Bridge Company
17	Ditto	Investigate legal feasibility of Mill-Lock-Weir route across river	Medium	Env Agency/ landowners
18	Routine Maintenance	Repair uneven pavement and road surfaces, including recovery at building sites	Short	OCC
19	Ditto	Cut back vegetation overhanging pavements and roads	Short	OCC/gdn-guerrillas