

Shorne Parish Council

— Borough of Gravesham —



Informal notes on representations received and responses given at the Parish Council Meeting held on 9th September 2021.

Please note that these notes do not form part of the Minutes of the Meeting, and whilst all reasonable effort has been taken, there is no guarantee of accuracy or completeness of the notes.

Preamble

The Chairman welcomed the Parishioners for attending the meeting. As it is unusual for so many parishioners to attend the meeting, the Chairman set out some ground rules. This is a formal Parish Council meeting, with a full agenda, it is not an open debate. Parishioners will be allowed a maximum of 10 minutes to present their concerns and views for the Council's consideration. The Chairman will then report on the Parish Council's current position before moving on to the next item on the Agenda.

As PCSO Middleton and PCSO Sivyer are on duty and have other matters to attend to, the Chairman allowed them to address the meeting first, with particular reference to the incident in The Street on 7th August, so that they can depart as soon as they need to.

Update Kent Police Community Support Officers

PCSO Ellie Middleton reported on the incident on the 7th August 2021, in which a vehicle crashed into parked vehicles in The Street and then into a resident's wall, and then the driver walked away. The vehicle was reported stolen from a nightclub in Dartford and made its way to Shorne where the incident happened. The suspect has not been apprehended yet, but PCSO Middleton has requested an update and will email the Parish Council on this. *(Post-Meeting note: PCSO Middleton has since informed the Parish Council that a suspect has been arrested.)* Inspector Beautridge intended to be here this evening but unfortunately, he was unable to come so sends his apologies.

PCSO Middleton also reported on other matters concerning Shorne during the past month. One involved an unsuccessful attempt to gain access to a garage in Pear Tree Lane, the other involved a bicycle stolen from the cycle shelter at Shorne Country Park. PCSO Middleton reported that there have been no reports of disturbances from nuisance motorcyclists in Park Pale in the past two months, but patrols continue to take place.

Cllr Rea reminded PCSO Middleton of the continuing problem of off-road motorbikes in Claylane Wood and the fields between Shorne West and Thong Lane. A parishioner reported that bikers were also trying to get through from Swillers Lane into the farmer's fields last week. PCSO Middleton is aware of bikers that are riding between Thong Lane and Crown Lane behind the Surgery, and the farmer will be installing a gate over the winter to try to prevent access for the bikers.

PCSO Middleton advised that she will be holding a surgery at Shorne Woods Country Park between 12.00 and 13.00 on 17th September 2021 for anyone who wishes to discuss matters.

The Chairman thanked PCSO Middleton for her report.

Representations from members of the public

The Chairman reported that the Parish Council had not received any formal questions in advance of the meeting, but would allow parishioners 10 minutes to present their concerns and views for our consideration. The Chairman asked if the parishioners had appointed a spokesperson, but it was left to individuals to state their views.

One parishioner said that we are here today to address problems with the volume and speed of traffic and the dangers presented on the stretch of road from the bottom of Tanyard Hill through The Street to Forge Lane. She had written to complain, and understood that others have also written, and felt that the Parish Council had provided her with very negative answers. Her question is what is the Parish Council doing about a traffic calming scheme?

Another parishioner from Crown Green expressed concern about turning right, due to the speed of vehicles coming down Forge Lane. There are two mirrors opposite Malthouse Lane, but there is still a blind spot, and she has experienced two near misses. She felt that if the vehicles slowed down it wouldn't be such a problem. It is worse at school drop-off and collection times, as traffic coming from the village has to cross over to the same side as traffic travelling towards the village.

Another parishioner from The Street reported that her car and her neighbour's car were badly damaged in the incident on 7th August. She understands that there is not a lot that can be done about traffic volume, but speed is the problem. She often hears heavy braking outside her house and is concerned about pedestrians passing as there is no footpath. When coming out of her cottage she has to hold on to her grandchildren and cannot see traffic approaching. It was lucky nobody was hurt when the car crashed into the wall. She doesn't know what can be done about the speed, but she is prepared to listen to whatever suggestions are made.

A parishioner said it was her son's car that was hit on 3rd September and her son's front wall that was hit on the 7th August, but he cannot be here because he is at work.

Another parishioner said that other villages such as Cobham have chicanes which allow just one lane of traffic through at a time. A footpath from the school to the village shops would slow traffic and limit it to one direction at a time, and avoid children and parents having to walk in the road.

A parishioner said the road is made narrower by the parking on one side of the road, but with parking on both sides of the road the parking is all over the place.

Another parishioner said residents need to park their vehicles somewhere, but her husband is now parking further down because he's worried his car is going to get hit.

A parishioner said she tends enter Shorne via Pear Tree Lane to avoid coming up Forge Lane as there is a brow on the hill and you cannot see what is coming from the opposite direction. She slows down every time.

Another parishioner said we don't have pavements, we can't have pavements in some areas, we don't have street lights, and we don't need double yellow lines all the way up which could make the traffic faster, as we are told parked cars act like a chicane. She knows not all Parish Councillors are convinced of the need or effectiveness of a 20mph limit. Do the Parish Councillors live in Shorne? *(Post Meeting note: All members of the Council live in Shorne; 6 in Shorne Village ward and 3 in Shorne West ward.)*

A parishioner reported that a resident who lives near to the speed indicator device in Tanyard Hill has noticed that it does have an effect on drivers when the SID flashes a warning of their

speed, and perhaps it could be moved either side of this stretch of road as a temporary measure to see if that has any effect. Another parishioner asked if it is possible to have the SID further down Forge Lane on the bend past Cob Drive for a period of time.

A parishioner said she was disappointed that the Chairman had written to her saying that “we had considered a 20 mph zone for the village centre but nobody would take any notice of it”. *Mr Lane responded on a point of order that he did not say that.* The parishioner said does everybody ignore a 30mph speed limit and does everybody ignore a 70mph speed limit, as she considers that was a negative answer. She would like to know what has the Parish Council done about traffic calming in this area, not at Shorne Country Park where the Parish Council has paid to have wooden bollards put up, you need to be thinking about people’s lives as there will be a fatality out there. *(Post Meeting note: the Chairman actually wrote that the Parish Council “is seeking to create a 20mph zone in the centre of the village. However, these measures are unlikely to influence drivers who are determined to drive recklessly.”)*

Another parishioner said that the speed that traffic comes round the bend and goes round and up Butchers Hill is also an issue, speed calming would take that away.

Another parishioner said she visits friends in Hayes Terrace and it can be quite dicey when you come out of the house, and she has nearly been struck by a car. The traffic cuts through at speed and it is quite dangerous. Her friend was sworn at by an impatient driver when she was unloading groceries from a car/taxi outside her house.

The Chairman thanked Parishioners for their comments. Before responding with the Parish Council’s current position, he invited Cllr Sweetland to say a few words.

Comments from Cllr Bryan Sweetland

Cllr Sweetland thanked Parishioners for attending. He advised that he has been a Kent County Councillor for 12 years, and in this area for about 8-9 years, and he represents all the villages and Parishes in Gravesham Rural. He is also a cabinet member of Kent County Council, and for 3 years he was responsible for Kent Highways.

Cllr Sweetland reported that over the years he had visited many Parish Councils in Kent and it seems that every Parish Council has the same concerns about traffic, to a lesser or greater extent. Kent Highways works with Shorne Parish Council and it is fortunate that the village has Councillors like Mr Lane and Mrs Lindley, as they really do understand Highways issues.

Cllr Sweetland said that he also has a personal interest as his daughter lives at Tanyard Hill, and he quite often takes his grandson for a walk down Tanyard Hill up to the new Play Area, He understands residents’ concerns and the scary situation of having no pavements in parts of the village. However, it is a village, and to put in pavements is not only expensive but it is also impractical, as where do you get the land from?

He thinks what residents want to see is people driving slowly and considerately through the village. Putting in a 20mph limit has been mentioned, but not all drivers will take notice of it. This was evident by several residents who admitted to seeing the 30mph interactive sign in The Ridgeway light up when they drove past.

Cobham has been mentioned, and in Cllr Sweetland’s experience The Street in Cobham probably has more traffic calming measures than anywhere else in Kent; it’s got bollards, chicanes, a 20mph speed limit, Speed Watch volunteers, yellow lines down the side and so on. Kent Highways has even had to install bollards on the pavements to stop cars mounting the pavement to get through the narrow street, and we are now just about to put another bollard in

front of The Darnley Arms because people keep hitting the wall of the pub. Cobham has had pretty much every kind of traffic calming measure there is, and yet still some cars speed through the village.

You need to consider what type of traffic calming would be effective. Speed cameras (which KCC do not fit anymore) work, but people tend to slow down when they see a speed camera and then speed up after they have gone through it, as is the case in Meopham. Ramps (sleeping policeman) are okay unless you live anywhere near them, because then you get the noise, vibration, and extra pollution. Speed cushions need to be in the middle of the road, but some drivers just line the tyres up and go straight over them, so they don't work that well.

The fact is that 98% of road accidents are caused by drivers and not roads. Cllr Sweetland said that he hasn't seen the police report on the incident on 7th August but he suspects that the driver was probably high on something or other.

The road through Shorne is not lit, which it would need to be if chicanes were installed. Cllr Sweetland said that when he was responsible for Highways, a chicane was installed in another village but within two years the Parish Council requested for it to be removed as it actually caused more accidents than the road without a chicane. They do work sometimes, but it has to be in the right places and under the right conditions. When Sole Street was resurfaced recently, KCC took the opportunity to put some road lines in and red tarmac to indicate the road speed, and the road lines at the side of the road give the impression that the road is narrower than it actually is. This can help to try to encourage people to drive slower, so there are measures that can be considered.

Cllr Sweetland has had meetings with Kent Highways, and we have regular meetings with Mr Lane and Mrs Lindley and we will be looking at what might be possible, and if approved we will have to decide who pays for it because these things are not inexpensive. Over the past ten years, KCC has had to make savings of more than £700 million, due to cuts in government funding and an increased demand for our services, so finding funding is not easy.

There are some measures that Cllr Sweetland has helped the Parish Council with via his Member's Grant allowance, such as the interactive sign and the Speed Indicator Device.

It is difficult to determine what sort of solution might be considered in Shorne. A physical chicane won't be considered unless there are street lights and not everyone wants to live in a village with street lights. There may be a stretch where some sort of lining scheme or a combination of different measures including a short 20mph stretch could be considered, but this would have to be agreed by KCC's highways engineers.

Both Kent Highways and the Parish Council are trying to find the right solution but it's not one size fits all. Nevertheless the Highways Improvement Plan that Shorne Parish Council has produced is a very comprehensive one. KCC has to work in conjunction with the Parish Councils, and we are led by the Parish Council. KCC has to prioritise the requirements of all 320 Parish Councils in Kent. Most of them have their own Highways Improvement Plans, and KCC has to consider where we would get the most benefit from our very limited amount of funds available.

Having said that, there has got to be something we can do, it's just finding the right solution, in the right area. Of course, the solution would be for drivers to be more responsible and to drive at lower speeds through the villages, but regrettably a lot of drivers don't heed this advice.

The Chairman thanked Mr Sweetland for his comments and for his contribution to the meeting.

Response from the Chairman on behalf of the Parish Council

Mr Lane reported that we need to understand that KCC is responsible for the highways in Kent. They have to balance their budget across the whole of the county, and they therefore have to prioritise the areas most in need. To help them do this, they look at the records of injury accidents, as published on CrashMap.

Shorne Parish Council also has to focus its very limited resources and its very small budget across the whole of the parish where the need is greatest, and we have to focus our efforts on where we have the best chance of achieving positive results. This also includes reviewing accident rates, prioritising those areas where the highest proportion of vehicles exceed the 30mph speed limit, and trying to get speed limits reduced where they are considered to be too high. Mr Lane hoped that Parishioners would all agree that this is the right policy.

Mr Lane reported that the roads where we have had the most injury accidents over the past 10 years include:

- Thong Lane, where there have been 5 accidents recorded in the 60mph section, and 3 in the 30mph section through Thong;
- Pear Tree Lane, where there have been 6 accidents in the 60mph section, and 1 in the 30mph section;
- The Ridgeway, where there has been 1 accident recorded in the 40mph section, and 1 in the 30mph section;
- Forge Lane, where there have been 2 accidents in the 60mph section, none in the 30mph section;
- Gravesend Road, where there have been 20 accidents recorded, the majority of them at Shorne Crossroads;
- Brewers Road, where there have been 7 accidents in the 40mph limit, most of these around the Country Park and the junction with the A2 slip road.

We have worked hard and spent a considerable sum of money to tackle these areas, some of which Cllr Sweetland has touched on.

In Thong Lane, KCC installed a chicane and imprinted 30mph traffic calming roundels, and Shorne Parish Council now operates its SID to educate drivers and monitor speeds here. This is the area where we record the highest speeds over the 30mph limit in the parish.

In Pear Tree Lane, after a lot of work we successfully persuaded KCC to extend the 30mph limit for the full length of the road, as we had 6 accidents in the 60mph section in the past 10 years, and we now employ our SID in this road to educate drivers and monitor speeds.

In The Ridgeway, we installed an interactive speed sign with Bryan Sweetland's support, and we have spent a great deal of time and effort over the past 3 years trying to persuade KCC to extend the 30mph speed limit to Brewers Road, but without success. But we have had village gateway signs installed, and we are awaiting road markings to help calm traffic before it enters the 30mph zone.

In Forge Lane, where we have had 2 accidents in the 60mph section, we have been working hard to persuade KCC to extend the 30 mph limit all the way down to Shorne Crossroads, and the latest information is that we have been successful. From what we have been told, KCC intends to reduce the speed limit in Gravesend Road from 50mph to 40mph from Crown Garage through to Higham, and at the same time they have agreed to reduce the speed limit in the 60mph part of Forge Lane, hopefully to 30mph.

In stark contrast, there have been no recorded injury accidents at all in Tanyard Hill, The Street, or in the 30mph part of Forge Lane in the past 20 years.

Only 3 months ago, we monitored speeds in Forge Lane, just down from the junction with Cob Drive, and not one vehicle exceeded the 30mph speed limit. Just a week ago, Mr Lane reviewed CCTV coverage of traffic passing between Forge Lane and The Street in both directions over an 8 hour period, and although the CCTV doesn't measure speed, he didn't see any evidence of vehicles driving at an excessive speed.

Nevertheless, we operate our SID in Tanyard Hill to educate drivers and slow traffic on the approach to the village. We have requested further measures to try to reduce traffic cutting through Hayes Terrace and we are awaiting for an outcome on this from Kent County Council.

And for the past 18 months or so we have been requesting KCC to consider a 20mph zone between Swillers Lane and Forge Lane near Pipes Place. As a 20mph zone, this would cover all the adjoining roads, including Cob Drive and Crown Lane, Hayes Terrace, Butchers Hill.

So far, KCC Highways has steadfastly refused to consider our request for a 20mph zone, since it does not meet their parameters. Nevertheless, although he personally does not believe that a reduced speed limit would have had any effect on the driver who created carnage in the village on 7th August, as it was a stolen car and the driver may have been under the influence, Mr Lane said that these recent incidents add weight to the arguments that we put before KCC Highways, and we will include them in our next meeting with them.

We intend to continue pressing for a 20mph zone. But please bear in mind that this would need to be a signed-only 20mph zone, with imprinted thresholds and repeater signs and road markings, and it would need to be self-enforcing. Any physical measures such as speed humps or chicanes would need street lighting and are likely to be unaffordable. In any event, Mr Lane said that he personally would not support this.

If we are successful in getting a 20 mph zone, no doubt Speedwatch will require more volunteers to help police it, assuming Kent Police sanction a suitable location, and Mr Lane hopes that some of you would step forward when the time comes.

Mr Lane said that he has now told parishioners what we have been doing for the last 3-4 years, what we have achieved, and what we intend to do in the future. We will continue to press for a 20mph zone. He advised Parishioners to keep a look out for a consultation that we hope to carry out in the later part of this year to obtain views from all our Parishioners, which we can present to Kent County Council so they can gauge the level of support.

He thanked parishioners for their input, and moved on to the next item on the agenda.