

Meeting Notes

Parish Meeting 7.30 pm Thursday 30th November 2023, in the Village Hall, concerning the proposed 20mph zone.

In attendance:

Chair of the Parish Council: Irene Mitchell

Vice-Chair of the Parish Council: Janice Muckian

Parish Councillor: Iain Lamont

Suffolk County Councillor (SCC): Robert Lindsay

Suffolk County Council (SCC) Highways Officers: Helen Beresford and Melanie Hall

Approximately 70 members of the public of whom approximately 20 spoke.

Introduction by the Chair of Lavenham Parish Council: Irene Mitchell

The Chair explained that the purpose of the meeting was to give the people of Lavenham the opportunity to give their views and ask questions about the 20mph scheme emphasising that the details are on the Parish Council website. The scheme has been in development for some years; the earliest date she has of public opinion on this topic is 2013. Residents were asked again in 2021. On both occasions the majority of those responding said yes to a 20 mph speed limit.

The Chair acknowledged that some may question the validity of resident opinion in questionnaires with low response rates. She asked all to recognise that most local authorities and local councils are elected with significantly less than 50% of those registered to vote actually voting and that this is the nature of democracy. She therefore asked all questions be about the substance of the proposed scheme rather than how we got to this point.

The original proposal put forward by the Parish Council, set out in a paper dated 2019, was for a 20mph speed limit to replace the existing 30mph limits. This was considered by Highways and for various reasons Highways designers considered that 20mph could not be applied to the entirety of that footprint. She added that she expected that Members of the Public will want to question this.

Comments from the Public, Questions and Responses:

Question: Why the limit is being introduced in an area where, in his opinion, it is not possible to drive above 20mph.

Responses: The Chair explained that SCC policy is only to permit 20 mph limits in areas where the mean speed is less than 24mph. SCC Cllr Lindsay responded that it is possible to drive at considerably higher speeds in some parts of the area e.g. High St and that he regretted that the SCC's rules meant that the area could not be larger and advised that, in his opinion, SCC has been pushed as far as possible.

Comment: Reference to low turnouts in the surveys

Response: From the Chair that everyone has the right to express an opinion in a survey or public vote. It's the votes cast that are counted and the majority view of voters is the decision.

Comment: Speeding issues outside the 20mph zone and her desire for the outlying areas of the village to be included in speed control and road safety initiatives. She highlighted Green Willows.

Responses: Helen Beresford (SCC) responded that the Melford Rd is on the outskirts of the village and that SCC aims to keep 20mph zones as small as possible as if they are over too wide an area it is not possible to enforce compliance. SCC Councillor Lindsay explained that the original proposal has been for the 30mph zone to be replaced by a 20mph zone with buffer zones beyond this, but that SCC policy considered there to be insufficient development beyond the core areas to permit this. Helen Beresford (SCC) highlighted that there is only development on one side of Melford Rd and this would have been a factor in the decision making.

Comment: A re-iteration of the points about Melford Rd, adding Bury Rd and Sudbury Rd to this point, highlighting the speed of the vehicles and the number of children walking to school and school buses.

Response: Cllr Lamont drew the attention of Members of the Public to the proposed 40mph zone on Sudbury Rd. The Chair said that she would appreciate SCC reconsider Melford Rd and asked if the Cabinet member for Highways could be asked to visit Lavenham.

Later response from Suffolk Highways: Traffic survey data showed an existing mean traffic speed on Church Street above 24mph. Therefore, existing traffic speeds were considered too high to comply with the criteria to reduce to 20mph and move the scheme out beyond Lavenham Church and this was also not supported by Suffolk Police.

Comment:

Regretted that this is the first Public Meeting on this subject with so many matters appearing to be already closed. Scheme has fundamental weaknesses with respect to Melford and other approach roads and the location of signs failing to reflect sightlines.

Highway Code now prioritises pedestrians which further strengthens the case for a 20mph limit which would reduce the risk of harm to the vulnerable such as the elderly and young e.g. school children.

Comment: It was not possible to go as slow as 20mph in parts of the 20mph zone and concurred with those speaking of speeding issues on Melford Rd.

Question: Whether the scheme designer had visited the village and spoken with residents.

Response: Helen Beresford (SCC) confirmed that the design team had visited many times.

Comment: The lack of policing of all limits highlighting that in Bildeston the newly introduced 20 mph is not complied with.

Response: SCC Cllr Lindsay replied that he lives in Bildeston and that he had noticed the speeds of some vehicles reducing. Some he said will obey the limit, some will consider it not to apply to them but most people will slow down a bit. Evidence is that the average slow-down is some 3-4mph. The Police, he said, cannot enforce all limits all the time but can and do have clampdowns.

Comment: That the 20mph will reduce pollution and improve road safety and asked who will police it. He explained he supported the scheme but wondered what the point was without enforcement.

Comment: Echoed the previous points expressing his understanding of the concerns of those living on the outlying roads such as Melford Rd.

Comment: Expressed concern about the visual impact of all the new 20mph signs. He estimated there will be nearly 100. Another Member of the Public pointed out that some of the signs will be on streets where the speed of traffic is controlled by a line of parked cars and requested that each sign be reviewed as to whether necessary.

Response: From Helen Beresford (SCC) that the signs will be at the frequency that SCC policy requires. SCC Cllr Lindsay said that signage is inevitably a compromise and that Bildeston showed it was possible to combine medieval heritage and the required signposting and that it had to be remembered that the lower speed limits made walking considerably more pleasant.

Later response from Suffolk Highways: Mandatory signs are required for any speed limit to be legally enforceable. Repeater signs for the 20mph have been carefully considered and have, in the most part, been situated at the maximum spacing 300m apart with 20m clear visibility (where practical) to minimise the visual impact.

Comment: The Chair questioned the proposal for Park Rd and why Preston Rd is excluded from the scheme asking SCC Highways to respond in due course.

Later response from Suffolk Highways Preston Rd; Due to the rural nature beyond the 30mph into the 60mph national speed limit the criteria could not be met to extend further to create a buffer zone for the 20mph to be extended along Preston Road. It was not supported by the Police, and it did not comply with policy or guidance. Driver compliance would be low, as there are none of the visual clues of a village setting.

Later response from Suffolk Highways Park Road: Same reasons as Preston Road, however this may be a suitable candidate for a 'Quiet Lane' however the funding from SCC for Quiet Lanes has finished.

Question: A Member of the Public asked about the likely cost.

Response: From the Chair, that the cost was unknown, but she recognised that this is an important issue for the village and added that the Parish Council had not made a decision as to whether or how it will fund it. The Parish Council she said will have to decide whether the scheme is affordable and good value for money but today the debate is about the design.

Later response from Suffolk Highways: The work is estimated to cost (at 24/25 prices) in the region of £24,065.46.

Further later response: As we are now into the new financial year (25/26) and costs have increased, we will need to get a revised construction cost if you decide that you would like to proceed with the scheme.

Question: Old maps were used in Highways plans and only recently updated. Highlighted that the old maps excluded recent developments all now scheduled to be outside the proposed 20mph scheme and asked that SCC representatives consider this.

Response: From Cllr Lamont agreed that the maps have been updated and confirmed that the signage has been updated considering the new maps.

Later response from Suffolk Highways: The plans were immediately updated as soon as the error was identified. The Scheme Designer has spent many hours in Lavenham whilst putting the 20mph design together and knows the area well.

Question: Why the 20 mph zone only begins at 1st Meadow near the Gate.

Response: From Cllr Lamont that this is because the consequent 30mph zone would need to extend too far into the countryside. The Chair explained that in due course it was likely that the Traffic Working Party would recommend moving the 1st Meadow Gate away from that corner.

Comment: Cllr Ranzetta described the Speedwatch efforts in Cavendish and Clare which include Speed Cameras and the sending of follow-up letters warning drivers of their speed. She said that she would be happy to be involved in a Lavenham Speedwatch.

Response: Helen Beresford (SCC) explained that the Parish Council could work with local people to set up a similar scheme.

Comment: A suggestion that the installation of speed cameras could be more effective than the 20mph zone where so much of the traffic speed is controlled by the narrowness of the streets and the number of parked cars.

Response: SCC Cllr Lindsay explained that the cameras are in short supply and can only be deployed temporarily. Permanent speed cameras cannot be obtained. The Chair expressed her frustration with those answers.

Comment: A suggestion that the village purchase more Speed Indicator Devices (SIDs).

Response: The Chair agreed this could be a good idea.

Parish Council Update: The Parish Council has installed two new SIDS on the Melford Rd.

Question: What data is there to show the effects of a 20 mph scheme?

Responses: SCC Cllr Lindsay and Helen Beresford (SCC) explained that the expected effects are for a 3mph reduction in average speed. Cllr Lindsay explained that even such a small reduction lessened the severity of road injuries. The Chair highlighted the number of incidents of damage to cars and explained that a reduction in the speed limit would help to reduce this.

Comment: Support for the 20mph zone because it will save lives and limbs and that the amount of extra time spent driving a little slower will be very small.

