

The A28 speed limit review: Bethersden (2009)

Background

- The Government's initiative to have a consistent approach to speed across the UK (Circular 01/2006).
 - Rational is to reduce the number of accidents.
 - To balance the need to travel with the need to improve quality of life.
- More accidents and deaths occur on rural roads.
- Kent Highway Services commissioned Jacobs Engineering UK Ltd (Jacobs) to conduct the review.
- Jacobs proposals released to Parish Councils for consultation in May 2009.
- Bethersden Parish Council (BPC) formed a working group to review Jacobs report.
- For many years, BPC and Bethersden residents have been campaigning to reduce the number of accidents along this stretch of the A28 after years of numerous accidents, including many fatalities.

Working Group

The group focussed on:

- The areas of the Jacobs proposal that were inconsistent with the KCC Road Safety Plan and DfT guidance Circular 01/2006,
- Vulnerability and safety of Bethersden residents that live along the A28.
- Collated data and information not available to Jacobs.

The working group met with Jacobs and Kent Highway Services on site.

Methodology

The working group collated data and information to respond to Jacobs proposals. The following approach was taken to gather information on the A28 in the parish of Bethersden:

1. **Questionnaire**
2. **Accidents**
3. **Nature of Road and Density of traffic**
4. **Photographs**
5. **Routes to schools**
6. **Correspondence with authorities**

Key Findings

1. Questionnaire results

Confirmed:

- Bethersden is a fully integrated and active community.
- 22% of the adults in the parish of Bethersden live along the A28.
- 44% are vulnerable based on age and mobility.

2. Accidents

These include fatalities, reportable and non-reportable along this stretch of the A28.

- Seven **fatalities** in recent years
- 29 **reportable** accidents in the five years ending 31st March 2009
- **Non-reportable** accidents last five years:
 - 31 accidents along The Bungalows between Furner Farm and The Cot
 - 27 accidents have taken place at in the vicinity of Spratts Barn
 - 20 at or near Bull Bridge
 - In excess of 50 accidents at Gascoigne Corner
- Cost of an accident (Source: DfT 2007)
 - Fatality £1.6m,
 - Serious injury £185k,
 - Slight injury £14k,

- Non-reportable £5k.
- BBC selected Bethersden for a day-long news report in December 2009, as identified this is an accident hot spot.

3. Nature of Road and Density of Traffic

- The A28 is a major through road, linking Ashford to Tenterden.
- The nature of the road represents a serious hazard due to a combination of:
 - its narrow width,
 - narrow or non-existent pavements and verges,
 - numerous bends,
 - poor visibility,
 - junctions and accesses,
 - pedestrians and cyclists,
 - parked vehicles.
- The density of traffic along the A28 at a rate of one vehicle every 4.8 seconds during peak periods.
- 8,000 vehicle movements generated by the residents and local businesses.
- The number of accidents along the A28 is abnormally high.

4. Vulnerability, risk and quality of life

The Jacobs report identified that the use of the sites by vulnerable road users is low. The findings from our questionnaire contradict this. The key factors impacting on the vulnerability of residents are:

- Narrow road (A28).
- The lack of safe pedestrian crossings.
- Pavements are narrow or non-existent.
- No cycle ways or wide verges.
- 10 public footpaths and bridleways with direct access to the A28.
- Use of road by locals: Commuting, Businesses, Deliveries, Recreational activities
- School children use the A28 when walking to school or waiting for buses.
- Speed and density of traffic
 - Cause residents to drive rather than to walk or cycle.
 - Some residents feel trapped: children not allowed to play, unable to cross the road with wheelchairs and buggies, house vibrates.
 - Restricts social activities.
 - Visitors reluctant to stop due to lack of parking, poor visibility, damage to parked cars.
- High number of accidents including vehicles crashing into residential properties.

The majority of residents show an overwhelming concern for the existing speed limit and lack of crossing points. Many have been campaigning direct with various authorities over speed and vulnerability.

Conclusion

- Jacobs recommendations do not take adequate note of the character and use of the road or impact on the vulnerability of residents.
- Bethersden is a fully integrated and active community which is suffering due to the nature of the road and the volume and speed of traffic.
- Bethersden conforms to the definition of a village and qualifies for a 30mph speed limit.
- The high level of accidents impacts on the quality of life and sense of vulnerability, and are costly.
- Risk needs to be mitigated by reducing the speed and implementing appropriate engineering solutions.

Reducing speed is not the total solution as the road and driver attitude and behaviour need to be taken into account. However, reducing the speed does make a significant impact on reducing accidents and improving the quality of life to meet the Government's purpose.

Research from Government sources, shows that the majority of drivers do conform to speed limits and therefore reducing speed is a cost effective solution to meeting the Government's initiative.