

Ashford Borough Council: Joint Transportation Board

Minutes of a Meeting of the Joint Transportation Board held in Committee Room Nos. 1 and 2, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **7th September 2021**.

Present:

Cllr. B Heyes (Chairman);
Mr. P Bartlett (Vice-Chairman);

Cllrs. Burgess, Cornish, T. Heyes, Krause

Mr. S Campkin, Mr. D Robey

Mrs. C Drury, Mrs. A Hicks, Mr. A Rogers – KALC Representatives.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Feacey, Spain, Mr. C Simkins.

Also present:

Cllrs. Hayward, Howard-Smith, Sparks, Wedgbury, Wright.

In Attendance:

Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager – ABC, Parking, Highways and Transportation Team Leader – ABC, Civil Enforcement Team Leader – ABC

Senior Highway Manager – KCC, District Manager – Ashford – KCC

Mr C Evans – National Highways, Chief Inspector Nick Sparkes – Kent Police.

Prior to the commencement of the Meeting the Chairman advised that he had brought Agenda Item 9 – A2070 Safety – Speeding and Anti-Social Behaviour – Discussion item, forward on the Agenda as he recognised there was a lot of interest in this item and certain contributors had attended specifically for that item.

94 Declarations of Interest

Mr Bartlett	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as he lived adjoining the Sevington Inland Border Facility site.	99
Mr Campkin	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as a member of South Willesborough and Newtown Community Council.	96

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Cornish	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as she lived near the A2070.	96
Mrs Drury	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as she lived on the A20 in an area prevalent for HGV parking.	100
Mrs Hicks	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as a member of Kingsnorth Parish Council.	96
Wedgbury	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as a member of Kingsnorth Parish Council and as he was involved in installing the original toucan crossing at the A2070.	96

95 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Board held on the 1st June 2021 be approved and confirmed as a correct record, subject to noting that the Declaration of Interest attributed to Mrs Drury was in fact made by Councillor Cornish.

96 A2070 Safety – Speeding and Anti-Social Behaviour – Discussion Item

In accordance with Procedure Rule 9.3 Ms Jaworska, a local resident, attended and spoke on this item. She said that as a resident of Kingsnorth she was one of the many thousands who were affected by inappropriate speeding and lack of enforcement on the A2070 and surrounding A2042. Safety was of course their biggest concern and as a parent of a 19 year old daughter, who drove to and from work, she was worried that she would be the victim of an accident caused by speeding drivers. Dangerous driving along these roads certainly discouraged her and her family from walking and cycling in this area. Noise, caused by aggressive driving, accelerating, wheel spinning and skidding, was also contributing to stress related health problems including sleep disruption, raised blood pressure and heart disease. They were often woken in the middle of the night to the sound of rapid acceleration and screeching tyres as vehicles repeatedly sped around the local roundabouts. She considered that the nonsensical speed limits on the local network of dual-carriageways indicated to the drivers what was expected of them and with the national speed limit deemed to be acceptable in certain sections, this seemed to encourage drivers to use these roads as their own private race track. Quiet enjoyment of the area was ruined by the noise of speeding drivers at all times of the day and night every single day. Motorbikes in particular could regularly be heard speeding and they were not merely passing through as you could hear them racing up and down the same stretch of the dual-carriageways. In fact, she knew that the A2070 was advertised on certain motorbike enthusiast websites as “one of the best

places in Kent to race without speed enforcement restrictions”, so not only did they have local drivers but also “speed tourists” who were treating local roads and residents with such disrespect. She considered that appropriate speed limits and enforcement must become an urgent priority with the emphasis placed on preventing casualties, reducing anti-social behaviour and improving the quality of life of local residents. Without appropriate speed limits and adequate enforcement she felt the rights of entire communities were being neglected and the police were being prevented from catching and deterring speeding drivers. She wondered how much police time was being wasted by local residents calling in to report speeding, but by the time they arrived the perpetrators were long gone. She knew that local drivers co-ordinated and altered other drivers when the police were in the area and simply waited until they had left to meet up and race again.

She concluded by saying that works were scheduled to commence to replace the Orbital Park (McDonalds) roundabout with traffic lights in order to increase road safety, but she was concerned this would only encourage higher speeds when the lights were green and thought that these works provided an opportunity to overhaul road safety in the entire area by imposing safer and more appropriate speed restrictions and ensuring these were backed by a comprehensive speed enforcement programme. This would make their roads safer and give local residents the quiet enjoyment they deserved.

A number of Members spoke on this item and raised the following points:

- This had been a longstanding issue that this Board had been discussing since at least 2017. Numerous letters had been written to Highways England (now National Highways) over the years and an application had been made for a decibel meter to get to the bottom of the issue. Some traffic surveys had been carried out which had been useful, but now was the time for more detailed traffic surveys between the Cloverleaf and Bridgefield roundabouts, including deployment of the decibel meter and then options around variable messaging signs or speed cameras on that stretch of road could be explored.
- There was a particular issue at the pedestrian crossing where drivers regularly sped and jumped the lights when people were waiting to cross. Could the police deploy vehicles to undertake speed checks on that stretch of road by the toucan crossing? Particularly in the early mornings at the weekend. That piece of road was the perfect length for motorcyclists to undertake “time-trials” and this involved accelerating as hard as they could for a quarter of a mile. This type of anti-social behaviour was unacceptable and it had led to at least three motorcyclists being killed or injured on that stretch of road. There was a need for a reduced speed limit, a permanent acoustic/speed camera and regular speed enforcement on this stretch of road.
- Whilst the results of the speed surveys may have proven a little inconclusive, it was undeniable that there was a major issue on this road with problems being experienced by residents at all times of the day and night and the problem had got a lot worse in the last four or five years, particularly in the summer. It was true to say that speeding may not be the main cause of

accidents, enforcement cameras were likely to encourage generally safer and more responsible driving behaviour and improve the overall situation.

- Whilst the residents who lived closest were obviously the worst affected, the noise was loud enough to spread to other areas quite some distance away. The main cause of the problem was accelerating motorbikes and their extremely loud exhausts and speed/acoustic monitoring would therefore be welcomed. Education had been mentioned, but this was considered unrealistic. This was a hobby in to which many had invested a lot of money and they were unlikely to change their behaviour without potential repercussions.

Chief Inspector Nick Sparkes (Kent Police District Commander for Ashford) advised that they had been attempting to police this issue for a number of years and it was challenging. Unfortunately there were currently no safe locations between the Cloverleaf and Bridgefield roundabouts to deploy speed detection vans, so they had tended to police either side of that and had run a number of operations (including in conjunction with Sussex police). He gave a number of examples of particular deployments they had made including the numbers of Officers involved and the results. They had tried engagement tactics, encouraging drivers to drive more responsibly in the area and had increased police visibility, however the problem, as had been highlighted, was that this was not a precise type of anti-social behaviour or breaking of road traffic laws. The timing of the issue was quite weather dependent which made it difficult to allocate resources. The motorcycles that they had stopped were almost exclusively road legal and riding within the law. They did have noisy exhausts but were normally within the legal limits (although perhaps deliberately right on the edge). So public perception and the noise associated with the acceleration of some of these motorcycles was accepted, but call levels in to the police did not indicate that this was an issue that merited a more dedicated response over and above some other priority issues. Geographically this was also a difficult issue to police. The road had been designed poorly and left itself open to this kind of situation. They had engaged with partners over a number of years and been advised that re-engineering was not an option, the accident statistics did not support a significant change and were in the majority of cases nothing to do with speeding, but driver error along with anti-social driving.

Some practical issues that Chief Inspector Sparkes mentioned included asking for a consistent message out to the public to report incidents which would help him understand the scale of the problem and bid for resources. He stated that the submission of evidence via dashcam footage could now be used, and had helped to prosecute offenders and offending vehicles had been seized under the Section 59 Police Reform Act. He was looking to deploy extra resources towards the issue of speeding and, if Member funding was available, there may be opportunities to employ Officers on their rest days on specific issues. These were only short term and potential solutions though. Longer term solutions were obviously needed however because policing their way out of this problem was not the solution.

Colin Evans from National Highways (NH) said he wanted to thank Chief Inspector Sparks for his assistance with the recent joint operation they had run on this stretch of the A2070 and the local Councillors who had been in regular touch with him on

this issue. He said he did not want people to think that NH were not interested, did not care or were not doing anything, but this was a very tricky issue as a Highway Authority as they were limited on what they could do and fund, and clear need had to be evidenced before they could apply for funding. He had initially thought that average speed camera systems would be highly beneficial and he had started work in this regard, but he just did not have the data to justify putting that forward. There had to be Ministerial approval for any new camera systems and it was highly unlikely that would be approved given average speeds under the current speed limit which met the current criteria. It did appear to be a very small number of 'high end' offenders who were causing the issues here. In terms of the noise nuisance, there were rules around vehicle exhausts, but not necessarily the engines. Decibel meters connected to variable messaging systems may be an option, but these were less effective with motorbikes where the noise of the engine was often greater than the exhausts. The actual messages able to be displayed on the strategic road network were also set and limited. NH did use acoustic cameras, but this was more around the noise generated from road surfaces rather than engine/vehicle noise. He considered continuation of the current partnership approach was the way forward, with a focus on education, training, communication and ultimately enforcement. Mr Evans reiterated in conclusion that he was not unwilling or unable to help. Whilst there were a number of things they could not do that they might otherwise like to, there were things that could be done and he would like to focus on those through partnership working. Safety remained their primary imperative and he would help where he could.

Rather than speed enforcement cameras if these could not get funding, the Board discussed the potential for CCTV cameras to be deployed to gather evidence of anti-social behaviour at the roundabouts etc. This was considered a route that merited further examination.

The Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager – ABC proposed that from a community safety perspective, the key stakeholders should form a small Multi-Agency Task and Finish Group to explore production of a strategy for the A2070. This could consider all of the matters raised in this debate with a view to bringing a proposal back to this Board ahead of next summer. The Board confirmed their support for such a group and strategy. Both Chief Inspector Sparkes and Mr Evans indicated their willingness to be involved in this work.

The Vice-Chairman advised that on the permitted messages for variable message system, he understood the point but advised that they had worked closely with the Department for Transport on the Inland Border Facility so there may be some opportunities to exert some influence. The Board also considered it would be worth the Chairman writing to Grant Shapps MP to lobby for changes to the criteria for enforcement cameras.

Resolved:

That the points raised during the debate be noted and a small Multi-Agency Task and Finish Group be set up to explore production of a strategy for the A2070. This could consider all of the matters raised in this debate with a view to bringing a proposal back to this Board by June 2022.

97 Parking and Waiting Restrictions – update summary

The report provided an update and summarised parking and waiting restriction schemes that had been through the Joint Transportation Board.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

98 Highway Works Programme Update

The report provided an update and summarised the Highways Works Programme and the identified schemes approved for construction in the next two years.

The Ashford District Manager – KCC advised that the Re-tread schemes schedules for May 2021 listed on page 15 of the report had now been completed.

The Chairman opened up the item for discussion and the following points were raised:

- The Moat Field Meadow toucan crossing was once again defective. Councillor Wedgbury was encouraged to report this again via the usual KCC channels.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

99 Update on the Sevington Inland Border Facility

The Senior Highway Manager – KCC gave a verbal update on the Sevington Inland Border Facility. He displayed a recent aerial photograph of the site and advised that work was continuing in two specific areas – the construction of the DEFRA Border Control buildings in readiness for 1st January 2022 and the creation of the recommissioned green viewing corridor to allow for the historic views between Sevington and Mersham churches. Further planting would happen here during the Autumn. There had been delays on the construction of the buildings in response to changes being made at the Dover site.

In response to questions he had been asked previously, he advised that there had been surveys carried out on the lighting due to concerns raised by local residents that it was too bright. Following the survey, some mitigation measures had been put in place such as baffles to reduce the impact and looking at a control management system which would automatically dim lights that were not being used or in areas where there was no activity. Lighting had also been turned off in the north west and south east corners of the site as these were only going to be used to accommodate increased capacity. He also advised that unfortunately there was still no update on the permanent signage on the M20 and that was still work in progress.

A KALC Member asked that any light surveys consider the wider issues of impact on other villages further out, especially in the context of the Borough's Dark Skies Policy.

Members mentioned that there were currently issues with HGVs using Monument Way, Willesborough as a rat run and getting stuck in Boys Hall Road and Church Road. Requests had been made to install "Not Suitable for HGVs" signs in these locations.

Resolved:

That the update be received and noted.

100 HGV Parking Enforcement Update

The Civil Enforcement Team Leader advised that from 1st January 2021 HGV enforcement had been undertaken by KCC under a new experimental traffic order which had been set up in East Kent during the Brexit transition. At the end of the six months, on the 30th June, the DfT did not agree an extension but confirmed that Ashford was authorised to go back to its Traffic Regulation Order for enforcement with clamping. ABC had only become aware of this at a very late stage in June and was not in a position to go back out enforcing immediately. They had since worked to re-set enforcement with the team and the clamping contractor and overnight enforcement had restarted earlier that week. They had also been out monitoring before they were able to enforce and were pleased to report that the numbers of HGVs parking, especially on the A20, were not in excessive figures. She said that she would give a fuller report in December following three months of enforcement.

Resolved:

That the update be received and noted.

101 Date of Next Meeting

14th December 2021