

MALVERN HILLS AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

17 NOVEMBER 2017

SPEED REDUCTION ON THE B4208 – AN EXERCISE IN PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Background

1. In November 2016 Worcestershire County Council consulted on a Traffic Regulation Order for a new 50mph speed limit on part of the B4208 in the parish of Castlemorton (the B4208 forms the boundary of the AONB in this area). The request to reduce the speed limit from 60mph to 50mph came from Castlemorton Parish Council and was supported by the County Council ward member.
2. The Malvern Hills AONB Unit responded to this initial consultation with the following:
 - Support for lowering the speed limit as proposed in the hope that it would reduce damage to livestock and vehicles from animals that have strayed from the common.
 - A request that strong consideration be given to extending the 50mph zone to the entrance to Welland village, for the same reason.
 - A request that any changes in traffic management infrastructure such as the number and/or size of signs which might be required to facilitate a change in speed limit are sensitive to the very high quality and open nature of the Unenclosed Commons landscape and are in accordance with the AONB Guidance on Highway Design.
3. In May 2007 the AONB Unit was informed that:

'Following investigation, assessment and careful consideration of all views expressed, including objections, the proposal has been authorised for implementation, by the Network Control Manager, without modification on 6th July 2017. Bearing in mind the environmental significance of this area, great care has been taken with regard to the mandatory signage, necessary to ensure that this speed limit is enforceable. All of the repeater signs will be mounted on existing street furniture and only the terminal signs, at the northernmost end, and the 6 side roads will require new posts.'

Scheme details and consultation

4. The AONB Unit made contact with the Senior Traffic Schemes Engineer in charge of the scheme who readily provided a copy of the works order plans showing what signage was being proposed and where. The AONB Unit

Manager carried out a site visit examining each of the signs proposed. This visit confirmed that many opportunities had indeed been taken by the Council to minimise the impact on the local landscape. However, a small number of concerns were communicated by the Unit to the Schemes Engineer. These focussed on:

- The number of speed repeater signs being proposed.
- The height of some posts being proposed for use, especially given the low lying and open nature of much of the landscape.
- The size of the signs being proposed.

5. A response from the Schemes Engineer suggested that some alterations/improvements could be made to the proposed works in one or two areas and these were subsequently incorporated. However, in general terms it stated that the proposed post heights and sign diameters were necessary to enable the police to enforce speed limits and were related to regulations and Department for Transport (DfT) guidance.

6. At this point the AONB Unit made contact with John Stock for some advice. John is a Technical Director with WSP with over 40 years' experience in highway design and the operation of roads. He also wrote the AONB Guidance on Highway Design. John very kindly looked through the proposed works order plans, engaging a WSP colleague (Jeremy Clarke) in the process.

7. John and Jeremy both felt that further landscape-related improvements could be made to the proposed signage scheme, especially with regard to the size of the repeater signs being used. The WSP representatives felt that these could and should be 300mm diameter signs, rather than the 450mm size which were proposed. They suggested a small number of additional amendments to the scheme, informed by the Department for Transport guidance on reducing signage clutter. A report containing the proposed amendments was sent to the County Council's Traffic Schemes Engineer. This prompted further consideration of the matter within the Council, including further liaison with the police. The County Council concluded that the size of the repeater signs specified (450mm) were appropriate and should be used.

Summary – Lessons learnt

- **Use of Highway Design Guide** – Worcestershire County Council began from a good starting point, having proactively used the AONB Guidance on Highway Design to help produce a scheme of works which included a number of compliant elements such as attaching new signs to existing posts where possible, not marking the road with coloured paint etc.
- **Adding value** – detailed inspection of the proposed signage works by the AONB Unit led to a small number of suggestions for landscape-related improvements which the County Council did accommodate in

a revised scheme of works. One or two additional comments suggested by WSP were also incorporated. The Council's Senior Traffic Schemes Engineer dealing with this job demonstrated a willingness to listen and to be flexible.

- **Engaging specialists** – the Unit was extremely fortunate that colleagues from WSP gave their time voluntarily to assist the AONB Unit in discussions with County Council Engineers on this matter. There is no doubt that WSP involvement led to stronger and more reasoned arguments being made, informed by references to Department for Transport guidance and regulations. It enabled the Unit to push the matter of landscape sensitive signage as far as possible.
- **Interpretation of Government Guidance** – traffic experts in the County Council and in WSP disagreed on the size of signs which were necessary/desirable in this case. Department for Transport regulations do allow for smaller signs to be used with special reference made to the desirability of reducing impacts on special landscapes. However, the County Council, in consultation with local police, felt unable to go this far, primarily due to fears about safety and difficulties with enforcement.
- **The future** – it is hoped that this exercise will make it more likely that the Highway Authority in Worcestershire will deliver landscape-sensitive improvements in the AONB in the future.

Recommendations

8. The Committee is recommended to:

- a) **Note the report.**
- b) **Discuss any issues arising from it with regards future traffic management schemes in the AONB.**

Contact Points

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