

Road Safety Improvements at Coopers Corner: Supporting Paper

What is this about:

In late 2017, the charity the Road Safety Foundation released a report entitled 'Cutting the Cost of Dangerous Roads'¹ which ranked the roads in East Sussex as being in the bottom 20% of county's for road safety performance improvement (61st out of 78 counties).

Unfortunately based on the latest figures available², the number of serious and fatal crashes in East Sussex has increased by 8%, with East Sussex's road safety performance falling behind Britain as a whole, with roads such as the A21 being ranked amongst the most dangerous in Britain.

The Dangerous Roads report names the four most persistently high risk roads in East Sussex where there has been there has been no significant reduction in the number of fatal and serious crashes. Councillors will not be surprised that the Hurst Green Coopers Corner junction with the A21 and A229 is statistically the worst in East Sussex, with tragically four fatalities and 25 serious crashes between 2013 and 2015.

In January 2018 Councillors from Hurst Green Parish Council met with the Member of Parliament for Bexhill and Battle, Huw Merriman MP, to discuss the report and the long standing issues arising from roads around and through the Parish. At the meeting it was reported that on behalf of the Council and residents, that he and the Member of Parliament for Hastings and Rye, Amber Rudd MP had raised these concerns with the Roads Minister, Jesse Norman MP in Parliament and that the Roads Minister had committed to meeting an East Sussex delegation comprised of local MPs, Councillors and local stakeholders.

The motions within this paper call attention to these matters, and if passed will confirm to residents of Hurst Green that their council is committed to lobbying the relevant parties and to work to affect changes which will improve the quality of life for residents - going far beyond the planned resurfacing and repainting of line markings outside of the village which this council has pushed for and we understand are due to be completed in February 2018.

Hurst Green Parish Council notes:

For at least twenty years the A21 to and from Hurst Green has featured in list after list as being one of the worst roads in the country, for example in 2002 it was named the 38th worst road in the country, with the AA stating in 2002 that they rated it as the third worst in the entire south-east of England. More recently in 2016, official documents from Highways England in the public domain state that the "the A21 has the worst personal injury collision record on the trunk road network and there is an imperative to improve that using a variety of measures³".

Tragically, the issues with traffic passing through Hurst Green have existed in some form since cars took to the streets. Sadly almost a hundred years ago in 1925, the late Mr Rummery, a local shopkeeper, was knocked down by a car and killed outside the village school⁴: tragically the same spot claimed more lives in another fatal accident in 2008, and another serious incident occurred just before Christmas [December 2017]. A brief look at the crash data of the roads around our village tell an upsetting story with literally hundreds of road traffic incidents recorded and minor incidents which often go unreported, anecdotally occurring weekly, if not every few days.

¹ Cutting the Cost of Dangerous Roads': Full British EuroRAP 2017 results report

² Figures compared between 2010-2012 and 2013-2015 by The Road Safety Foundation

³ Highways England project brief: A21 Route Treatment Project Feasibility Study [2015]

⁴ Hurst Green Recollections, compiled by Ann Jenner for the Hurst Green Historical Society

Despite large and small scale schemes not progressing, Highways England have repeatedly referenced in official documents that “if the schemes outlined in the BBMMjv [Balfour Beatty Mott MacDonald] project plan are not progressed, these locations should be reviewed in the context of safety, accessibility and sustainability⁵”. To-date no such schemes have been implemented, indeed the last two proposed schemes in 2013 and then 2016 were quietly cancelled, and in relation to the most recent, the plan to install average speed cameras which was strongly supported by this council has astonishingly now been rejected by Highways England on the grounds that ‘kerbside parking on the A21 effectively controls the speed to 30mph’. As councillors and residents will know, it is rare to find any car parking on the A21, or indeed observing the speed limit driving through the village. Indeed when driving at the speed limit, this usually results in being tailgated and being overtaken, particularly along the straight stretch of road outside the school. This area also suffers from driver confusion, which sees the speed signs near the school both activated outside of school hours, and with one sign often displaying 20 mph, while the other displays the speed limit as being 30 mph.

In 2015 Highways England made a commitment that was published within a report entitled ‘Highways England Delivery Plan 2015-2020⁶’. This stated that “through the investment and wholesale modernisation of the [road] network [Highways England] will ensure that by the end of 2020 more than 90% of travel on the strategic road network is on roads with a safety rating of EuroRAP 3* (or equivalent).” Critically to support this, the report added a further commitment “We will also ensure that the majority of those roads with 1* and 2* safety rating have improved to 3*.”

Regrettably as of January 2018, details of which roads scored which star ratings, or indeed which roads will be upgraded have not been made public by Highways England. However, it is safe to assume that the A21 is likely to score badly. Speaking on why these ratings haven’t been released, in an interview with the trade press magazine Transport Network⁷, Operations Director (acting) at Highways England, Mike Wilson has stated, ‘[Highways England] designated funds activity is focused on upgrading those lower standard roads, we will be comfortable to share what we are doing to improve those lower rated roads, which tend to be single carriageways, which actually have a higher risk to road users. There is no secret involved and we are confident that by the end of the Road Investment Strategy we will achieve the target that has been set.’

In addition to the target to improve most roads to a 3* rating, Highways England have also released a target to reduce killed and serious injury casualties by at least 40% by the end of 2020 against a 2005-2009 baseline.

It is therefore quite possible that plans to replace those cancelled plans to improve safety along the A21 and at Coopers Corner are being developed by Highways England in light of these targets and commitments, but that consultation with bodies such as this Council has not yet happened, or indeed details of these plans publicly announced.

Unfortunately the specific proposals for a roundabout at Coopers Corner and also for a mini-roundabout at the A265/A21 Hurst Green junction⁸ referenced in the latest published scheme documents⁹, as recently as May 2016 (but now cancelled), have been lost altogether by Highways England. Citing this loss ‘due to a change in service provider in 2016 that these records were no longer held’. This is unfortunate as this means that those at Highways England involved in coming up with alternatives will be starting from scratch, and any future schemes will need to be devised without reference to what was already proposed.

⁵ A21 Route Treatment Project Feasibility Study [2015]

⁶ Highways England Delivery Plan [2015-2020]

⁷ <https://transport-network.co.uk/Exclusive-Highways-England-to-get-interactive-in-2018/14702>

⁸ A229 roundabout NMU improvements BBMM JV” and “Hurst Green A265 mini roundabout BBMM JV”

⁹ Proposed Safety, Accessibility and Sustainability Improvements (issue P1), as part of the Highways England A21 Route Treatment Feasibility Study project [HE553662]. [May 2016]

In the immediate term, following a meeting held between the parish council and East Sussex Highways in November 2017, Councillor Brown has been in further communication with the East Sussex Highways Road Safety Team who have agreed to revisit Coopers Corner again to review the lack of give way notice signage on the A229, with a view to addressing this to provide more notice of the forthcoming junction.

The East Sussex Highways Road Safety Team have also confirmed that they have requested that Highways England repaint the give way road markings and hatching at the Coopers Corner junction. However, in a response received by Councillor Brown on the 29th January 2018, from A-one+ (Highways England's contractor for the Hurst Green area) in response to East Sussex Highways request, Highways England have indicated that whilst they will get around to repainting the faded Coopers Corner junction markings at some point in the next financial year, they do not consider the faded markings to be a safety defect. So a very different opinion between the two authorities, and one that will give residents little confidence in a solution being found that improves safety at Coopers Corner.

It is clear that neither Highways England or East Sussex Highways have expressed a desire to make increasing safety at Coopers Corner a priority. Indeed Highways England have still not confirmed whether or not the resurfacing will actually include all of the junction, or just up to just before it. So whilst it remains unclear exactly what would lower casualties and collisions at Coopers Corner, it is my intention to pursue, consult on and continue to pressure the relevant bodies to implement a series of sensible solutions that would likely reduce accidents from occurring at the Cooper Corner junction ahead of the possible implementation of major changes.

Ideas suggested from local residents and by Councilor Brown include exploring the idea of:

1. Starting the 30 mph speed limit before the Coopers Corner junction;
2. Delaying the start of the 50 mph speed limit until after the junction - so that vehicles turning from the A229 onto the A21 towards Tunbridge Wells do not have to contend with two lanes of 50 mph+ traffic;
3. Adding an advance notice of the junction on to the A229, such as a give way sign with a distance marker;
4. Adding the junction's name [Coopers Corner Junction] to the top of the direction sign on the A229 to make clear that it is a T-junction and not two turnings off the road;
5. Adding a second give way sign at the junction itself - bringing the junction inline with other major junctions (such as the A265/A21 in the centre of Hurst Green), which have give way signs to the left of, and also in the centre of the junction;
6. Improving the lighting around the junction;
7. Improving driver's awareness of the risk of the approaching junction, including coloured and high friction surfacing and visibility improvements;
8. Raising drivers awareness of the junction's status as an accident blackspot;
9. Reducing general street clutter / furniture in the vicinity of the junction;
10. Looking to introduce a community speedwatch scheme, such as in Etchingam¹⁰;
11. Starting a 40 mph zone north of the two petrol stations past Coopers Corner (maybe just beside the entrance to Orchard Farm);
12. Working with school's Parents Teacher Association and The Road Safety Foundation (RSF) to explore becoming a pilot area for the RSF's star rating for schools scheme.

¹⁰ Community Speedwatch www.communityspeedwatch.co.uk

Hurst Green Parish Council resolves:

I am recommending that the council considers passing a series of motions to confirm to residents of Hurst Green parish that their council is committed to lobbying the relevant parties and to work to affect changes which will improve road safety and the quality of life for residents:

Proposed Motion 1: “That Hurst Green Parish Council is dismayed that the Coopers Corner junction at Hurst Green has been named by the Road Safety Foundation as the most dangerous place on the road network in the entire county and calls on East Sussex Highways, Highways England and bodies such as the Road Safety Partnership to build relationships and work together along with the Parish Council, local MP’s and with residents to urgently produce an actionable plan to assess and improve safety at this junction, for now and in the future, delivering on promises made to improve the personal injury collision record on the A21, ensuring that everyone gets to go home safely at the end of every day.”

Proposed Motion 2: “That Hurst Green Parish Council continues to recognise the hugely negative impact the ever increasing through traffic carried on the A21, A265 and A229 has on residents quality of life, with noise, inconvenience, pollution and recognises the devastating impact on people’s lives that occurs when collisions and accidents happen. This council remains committed to lobbying the relevant parties for change that will see safety improvements and ultimately all through traffic removed from the village’s roads to enable the village to become a safer place.”

Proposed Motion 3: “That Hurst Green Parish Council are pleased that Highways England have responded to the repeated requests of this council to resurface the A21 through the parish with low noise tarmac in early 2018, but are dismayed at the decision to not include resurfacing the A21 through the village itself in its plans and calls on Highways England to reconsider its decision to not include the village in its 2018 resurfacing plans.”

Councillor A. Brown

Hurst Green Parish Council

January 2018

Supporting Photograph:



Photograph taken before the primary school, approaching Hurst Green from Silver Hill at 4.19pm on Saturday 27th January 2018, showing the left hand sign activated and displaying a 20mph limit while the right hand sign displays 30mph.