

GTA Traffic Calming Feasibility Assessment December 2021

Winchelsea Traffic Calming Working Group Response

Executive Summary

- ❖ The resident members of the Working Group welcome the report as an important first step in developing long term viable solutions to speeding through traffic. The project should now move on to deliver an effective long term solution.
- ❖ Winchelsea is an important historic town within an Area of Natural Outstanding Beauty with historic buildings requiring protection. Traffic calming presents a major opportunity to enhance the town's heritage and protect Strand Gate as well as making residents and visitors safer.
- ❖ Our response challenges some of the initial findings and raises a number of questions that need to be addressed before a final decision can be made. The GTA report identifies a number of options as a preliminary stage in the development process and acknowledges that each will need to be refined and developed further.
- ❖ Residents will wish to be involved in the development process and ESCC will require that they are.
- ❖ The report makes no reference to the four recent accidents, all on the High Street and German Street, a harsh and necessary reminder why traffic calming is so important.
- ❖ Our response is in two parts. Part 1 provides general comments on report content (p.3 and 4) and specific comments on each option based on four criteria: likely impact, affordability, protection of conservation area and ESCC support (p.4 and 5). We have also considered specific measures options raised by residents prior to the publication of the report (p.6 and 7).
- ❖ Part 2 sets out the necessary next stages and how we may work with IPC and ESCC to refine a choice of design, consulting on it and gaining the support of ESCC (p.7 and 8).
- ❖ The GTA report provides an outline of two possible options. In summary, they are:

A: Closing Strand Hill.

B: One way along Strand Hill, north bound or south bound, linked to 20 mph zones and construction of build outs/ chicanes every 60 metres along High Street and German Street, anti-skid material laid at New Inn junction and a speed gate in Monks Walk.

- ❖ We do not consider either Option A or B to be a preferred choice at this stage. Option A is unlikely to be supported by ESCC. Option B requires multiple expensive measures, significant changes to the street landscape and no certainty of impact.
- ❖ At this stage, the Working Group proposes an option that restricts but does not close access to Strand Hill by introducing 'No left turn/no right turn' at the bottom of the Hill. This has the benefits of closure without cutting off the route entirely. It is more likely to be supported by ESCC. It is feasible, affordable, respectful of the historic location and able to be tested without expensive construction or disruption.

- ❖ All options will require consultation and payment of fees and charges to ESCC before final approval at a cost of several thousand pounds. However, there is a significant difference in the extent of works needed and therefore capital cost. As the report is silent on cost, we have included high level cost estimates previously provided by GTA to indicate likely costs of each option.
- ❖ The report is silent on the possible views of ESCC. Their support is necessary as the body responsible for making a final decision. Part 2 of our response sets out how this can be achieved.
- ❖ The effect of active traffic management on the school, New Inn, Little Shop and museum is an important consideration that needs to be explored further as part of the consultation required by ESCC, as shown in Part 2 of our response.
- ❖ The use of a Temporary Traffic Regulation Order could be considered as a simple and cost effective measure to 'test' actual impact of a preferred option on road safety and our commercial premises.
- ❖ We appreciate this is the first stage of wider debate and consultation. In Part 2, we set out how we may proceed to a successful conclusion in partnership with IPC.

General comments

1. The data provides a clear view of the scale of the problem over several years with over 18% / 1 in 5 vehicles travelling on the A259 north of Winchelsea cutting through the town and frequent incidents of poor driving and speeding.
2. IPC requested the Working Group to send their response by 31 December, a very short timescale. We have done so, submitting our assessment of the data and the specific options. IPC did not invite the Working Group to work alongside the consultant during the preparation of the report which means that our response raises important issues which could have been addressed earlier in the process. Both the Group and residents generally should now be more fully involved in the further stages of scheme development.
3. When reviewing the options offered in the report, we considered four key questions:
 - i. how likely is it to reduce speeding and through traffic and to what extent;
 - ii. what resources (time/money)are needed for implementation and maintenance;
 - iii. does it respect and protect the historic nature of the town;
 - iv. is ESCC likely to support it?
4. There is limited evidence of likely impact, resources required and no detail on implementation. This is understandable at this stage but makes it hard to understand the relative merits and business case of each option and in particular why one way with additional measures is highlighted.
5. The report has a section 'Accident Data (P.14 sec. 4.5) that shows incidents 2016-2020. There is no reference to the four accidents requiring police involvement in the past three months. They occurred at different locations at Strand Gate, High Street, German Street and High Street/ Higham Green junction. All involved vehicles driving through, not stopping, in the town.
6. We are disappointed that the report makes no reference to what may be acceptable to ESCC, the body that makes a final decision on local measures, whoever pays for them. This needs to be addressed promptly. Part 2 of our response sets out how this may be done.
7. The lack of indicative costs in the report means we cannot give a comprehensive response on the viability and affordability of any one option. This is important because of the obvious differences in scale and complexity of each option. We have included recent indicative costs quoted by GTA to give a sense of how much investment may be needed.
8. The potential impact on visitor attractions and the two commercial premises, the Winchelsea Farm Shop and the New Inn is important but is not part of the GTA report. It is crucial that that we seek evidence rather than rely on anecdote and recognise that wider issues outside traffic patterns affect local footfall and long term viability.
9. All changes to local road access require ESCC to issue a Traffic Regulation Order. ESCC charges significant fees to do this which need to be included in costings. ESCC may meet these costs, in part or in full, through an application for community share funding. Whichever option is chosen, this will be the final stage before implementation. A summary of the work and location is advertised by ESCC in local media, usually newspaper and their own website inviting written comment. Any proposed option would have been widely consulted prior to this stage but it is a statutory requirement to publish the details.
10. A Temporary Traffic Regulation Order is a streamlined version which is used when temporary works are required or to test the impact of longer term changes. It is cheaper to process and takes less time. It can be made permanent or withdrawn, as the impact of the changes become clear over a period of up to 18 months.

11. This could be extremely useful if there is strong local support for closure or 'no left turn/no right turn, allowing a cost effective test of the impact on road safety and commercial premises without expensive construction that may not work.
12. We consider there are two proposals worthy of consideration in the next stage: A. No left turn out and no right turn into Strand Hill and B. One way north only at Strand Hill.

Option A: Closure or restricting access to Strand Hill

- ❖ The report acknowledges that closing or restricting access would remove the ability of drivers to use the High Street and German Street as a rat run. We consider the complete closure of Strand Hill to be unnecessary and would not be supported by ESCC. We therefore focus on a similar but possibly more acceptable option of restricting, but not blocking, access at the bottom of Strand Hill.
- ❖ We know from ESCC studies, local data and observations that it is drivers using these streets as a 'short cut' that are speeding to achieve a shorter journey time, rather than a local resident parking their car or driving to the shop. It follows that, when we remove access to the rat run, we significantly reduce the incidence of speeding.
- ❖ This option also respects the conservation status of the town. It would reduce the potential traffic hazard to the Gate and does not require any structural or cosmetic changes to the street landscape.
- ❖ The financial costs would be limited to the cost of obtaining a Traffic Regulation Order to agree the changes in access at Strand Hill and signage. We understand this will amount to several thousand pounds but they are costs required whichever option is preferred.
- ❖ Emergency vehicles would continue to access Strand Hill and Winchelsea town as they do now, as needed. This is the case, whichever option is considered.
- ❖ Residents and visitors would continue to have several access and exit points between the A259 and Winchelsea Town, whichever direction they travel. There is no indication why visitors would find it difficult to use any one of these junctions to access the town. Indeed, one of the access/ exit junctions provides direct access to the New Inn car park for its visitors and customers. There are several access points a few seconds away from the Museum, church and Winchelsea Farm Shop.
- ❖ This option would also remove the difficult sharp left turn up Strand Hill and the number of drivers taking the sharp right hand turn on a bend off the A259 (adjacent to Strand Lodge) to drive through Winchelsea.

Option B: One way in Strand Hill/ 20 mph zones/ speed gates/ build outs and anti- skid surfaces areas

- ❖ Our primary concern is that removing oncoming traffic would encourage greater, not less speed.
- ❖ South or north bound traffic would have unrestricted use of the road and rat running may become more attractive without the obstruction of oncoming traffic. We consider that one way, either southbound or northbound, is likely to create higher speeds, more traffic and considerably more danger to pedestrians and cyclists using the High Street and German Street.
- ❖ The report offers no evidence that 20mph zones work in this type of location without close and constant monitoring. The police confirm that they do not enforce these zones. We understand that 20 mph signage reduces speeds by only 2-3 mph. All reports on local traffic behaviour from 2018 to date indicate regular speeds of over 40mph.
- ❖ Many through drivers use the route through Winchelsea multiple times every week. It will be obvious very quickly to regular drivers that there is no penalty in exceeding the speed limit. We would prefer that drivers did take notice but many ignore the current 30 mph signs and we do not consider an unenforceable 20 mph zone a realistic or effective deterrent.

- ❖ The benefit of the proposal to build a speed gate at Monks Walk is not explained. They are generally used in locations where there is a high level of traffic new to the area, particularly tourist locations such as Winchelsea Beach. We do not see an obvious benefit when trying to reduce traffic that knows the location very well. In our view, they are an expensive measure.
- ❖ The report suggests installation of buildouts at regular intervals to narrow the road width. We understand several build outs would be required spaced at c. 60 metres apart. As each build out may cost c. £ 7500 the total cost of this single measure is high.
- ❖ Any narrowing of the road would need to accommodate utility vehicles and refuse trucks. This would allow standard vehicles more than enough space to speed through, reducing effectiveness in reducing speed.
- ❖ There is an existing narrow access point at Strand Gate which has a limited effect on slowing vehicle speeds once through the Gate. From local observations, drivers make up for any temporary need to slow down by rapid acceleration thereafter. The report makes no reference to this.
- ❖ Crucially, there is no recognition of how a clear run of traffic one way will affect the main access to and from the local primary school. It is likely that through drivers will be accelerating up the High Street at the very point that school related traffic is turning left into or exiting from St Thomas'. We consider it will make entering and exiting more, not less dangerous.
- ❖ Access to the Winchelsea Farm Shop is likely to be similarly affected by faster traffic, making it more difficult to stop safely outside the shop, particularly if it locates as planned to the north side of the High Street.
- ❖ The financial cost would be significant. GTA has previously estimated the following basic costs based on their experience of similar schemes:
 - 20 mph £10,000 (+ street lighting costs)
 - Pinch point/ buildout £7500 (multiple build outs are required)
 - Speed Gate £6000.
- ❖ There is data available from other County Councils, including Cornwall, Bath and N E Somerset and Wiltshire that indicate similar or higher costs. We cannot know more precise costs at this stage and these figures are given as a broad indication only of the potential difference in costs between the two options. We have no information on long term maintenance costs.
- ❖ In our view, the report does not provide evidence that the expected high cost and construction of a complex set of measures would make a significant positive difference to speed or volume of through traffic. We consider that a one way route combined with an unenforceable speed limit and limited road narrowing would encourage higher speeds and volume of through traffic with particular consequences for the school and customers of the Little Shop.

Other measures

13. We feel it important to recognise traffic calming measures previously raised by residents but not included in the report and consider whether they merit further evaluation. We also comment on the references in the report to traffic lights and closure of Strand Gate.

Traffic lights at Strand Gate

14. The report refers to the possibility of introducing traffic signals on Strand Hill to create an artificial delay. We understand this reference was included at the request of IPC, rather than a measure offered by the consultant.
15. We can find no evidence of traffic lights being used as a traffic calming measure in either rural or urban areas and there is no mention in the various information sets published by UK County Councils on traffic calming. The report advises that 'daily management and enforcement would be required' to keep them working 24/7 and stop jumping of lights. There is no indication how this would be achieved or funded as a long term arrangement but any ground based structure would be exposed to damage from passing vehicles. We do not know the capital cost of permanent traffic lights and installation.
16. The report mentions that they would not restrict the movement of emergency vehicles, presumably by going through a red light if needed. This is not a particular advantage. None of the options in the report restrict emergency vehicles in any way.
17. Not only is there no evidence of traffic lights being used to calm traffic and therefore any data on possible impact, it appears to create a serious hazard by forcing waiting traffic to back up down the hill while traffic continues to turn left from the A259. The local traffic survey in September/October this year recorded traffic flows at peak times through the Arch of over 100 vehicles in in 30 minutes. It would take a very short time to create a line of traffic that obstructs safe turning from the main road.
18. We would also question the safety of forcing traffic to wait on a steep hill in front of a blind bend. These safety issues suggest traffic lights are unlikely to be supported by ESCC, police or National Highways as the authority for the A259.

Rising bollards

19. This has been raised by a resident in response to the report. These are generally used to block rather than manage traffic flow and we cannot find evidence of their use in calming traffic. This may be because of potential dangers in putting an automatic solid obstruction in front of moving traffic. We have also referred earlier to the volume of traffic passing through the Arch and it is difficult to see how a bollard(s) would operate in front of a high volume of traffic. The delay while in operation would also create a similar problem to the traffic lights of traffic backing up down the Hill.

Planters

20. There is increasing use of heavy planters to block or restrict road access in both rural and urban areas. They are often more visually attractive than traditional street furniture and require minimum maintenance. We do not know whether they would be sufficient on their own to change traffic behaviour but using them to restrict road width at regular intervals instead of expensive build outs/

chicanes may be an option. However, they need to be properly lit at night which will be a significant ongoing cost.

Static bollards

21. Vehicles parked in the High Street and German Street are particularly vulnerable to being hit by through traffic as confirmed by recent accidents. The use of a single heavy bollard at each end of a line of parking spaces placed at vehicle width would better protect parked cars and allow visitors to the Museum, Winchelsea Farm Shop and the church to park safely and close by. Again this may not be enough to deter determined speeding vehicles but it may make the High Street and German Street less attractive as a short cut.

Conclusion

22. We do not underestimate the difficulty of finding a suitable arrangement that is supported by a majority of residents. At this stage, the Working Group proposes 'No left turn/no right turn' as feasible, affordable, respectful of the historic location and able to be tested without expensive construction or disruption.
23. We appreciate this is the first stage of wider debate and consultation. In Part 2, we set out how we may proceed to a successful conclusion in partnership with IPC.

PART 2: NEXT STEPS AND ESCC CONSULTATION REQUIREMENTS

- ❖ ESCC makes the final decision on whether a preferred option for traffic calming goes ahead, irrespective of who pays for them.
- ❖ It will not agree any option without evidence of structured and collaborative consultation at defined stages that allow residents and local business to comment as choices are made, measures are refined and a suitable design is published.
- ❖ We summarise below our understanding of the wider consultation required by ESCC and how IPC may work with residents to complete the remaining stages of design and submission to ESCC.

1. Early Scheme Development

Explore possible options at high level with ESCC with resident support to do so.

2. Initial design (feasibility stage)

Residents and local business are consulted on type(s) of scheme that may be appropriate. This is intended to demonstrate the level of local support.

3. Design

Apply resident and business feedback received at Stage 2 to agree an initial design with details of location, type of measures and how they may look. The design requires consultation with ESCC, Rother DC (Conservation officer only), emergency services, police and National Highways as the authority responsible for A259.

4. Detailed design

Final development of a scheme, informed by any concerns raised at stage 3.

This includes all aspects of the scheme, including materials to be used, signing, road marking, drainage, construction and future maintenance. ESCC make a final decision to allow or not at this stage. Statutory services would only be consulted again if changes made since stage 3.

- ❖ The Working Group has made several requests to work with IPC to progress the consultation process required by ESCC. We hope we will be invited to do so and suggest that it may be possible to get the process back on track.
- ❖ In 2018, local residents gave strong support for developing options at an open meeting chaired by IPC. In the same year, ESCC published a Feasibility Appraisal which assessed the extent of local speeding and rat running. ESCC confirmed its support for traffic calming measures and in 2019, offered an initial proposal for further development. This prompted IPC to seek funding and commission the GTA report.
- ❖ If IPC enable GTA to address the questions and comments it receives on the report at an open meeting with residents, ESCC may agree that actions to date would demonstrate completion of Stages 1 and 2.
- ❖ Based on our understanding of IPC and ESCC actions taken to date, we propose the following next steps to progress to stages 3 and 4.
 - i. IPC arrange a public meeting with GTA, residents and local business that provides a presentation and Q and A session to address questions and comments received on GTA report.
 - ii. Within an agreed timescale, IPC collaborate with the Working Group and Winchelsea Residents Association to agree and commission an **initial** design based on all feedback received.
 - iii. IPC request views on the initial design from the relevant agencies.
 - iv. IPC collaborates with Working Group and WRA to agree a **final** detailed design and submit to ESCC for final decision.
- ❖ We hope this information is helpful to residents, commercial owners and IPC. There is more work to be done and we look forward to working with all parties in the coming months.

Winchelsea Traffic Calming Working Group
30 December 2021