

Appendix 2 – Background Information on Alfriston and the history of the development of traffic management options for the High Street

1. Introduction

The purpose of this Appendix is to set out the background information about Alfriston and the traffic problems encountered in the High Street history as well as the development of proposals to try and improve the situation.

2. Background information

Alfriston is an historic village situated on the C39 between the seaside town of Seaford and the A27. It is within the South Downs National Park and the centre of the village is a designated Conservation Area.

Tourism is key to the village economy, helping to support a number of pubs, hotels, restaurants, cafes and shops, the majority of which are on the High Street.

The High Street lined with historic buildings also retains a large number of residential properties. The High Street also forms part of the C39 linking Seaford with the A27 and is used by emergency vehicles accessing the A27 and as a diversion route if parts of the A27 are closed during an emergency.

Approximately 4,000 vehicles travel through the village each day, which is not excessive for a small village. The traffic problems stem from the constraints on the amount of road space available in the centre of the village. The most critical area of concern is a 60 metre section of the High Street which narrows to approximately 3.6 metres in width. A bend in this stretch of the High Street limits forward visibility, which means that vehicles frequently meet one another within this narrow section with one vehicle having to mount the narrow footway to get past. There is a long history of damage to the historic buildings that line the High Street which are occasionally struck by high sided vehicles trying to manoeuvre past other vehicles.

The congestion and delays generated in the narrow section of the High Street also contribute to a notable level of frustration and aggression amongst some drivers. When two vehicles try to pass one another there is insufficient room on the narrow footway for pedestrians. Although most of this manoeuvring takes place at very low speeds, there are many reported instances of pedestrians being struck by vehicles. There has been one serious personal injury crash recorded in the High Street in the three year period to June 2016.

A 7.5 tonne weight limit (except for loading) applies in the village but as with many such limits this is not routinely enforced and there are frequent instances of vehicles larger than this limit passing through the village.

Although many local people are very concerned about the traffic related issues in the village, opinion is very divided about what sort of measures would be appropriate to address these problems. Two local pressure groups have been formed to try and develop potential

solutions to the problems; SAFE (Save Alfriston for Everyone) and SHARE (a group seeking a solution based on the principles of shared space)

The current Alfriston Parish Plan produced in 2009, commits the Parish Council to working with local people to develop a solution to the traffic problems in the village. Since 2009, a number of initiatives have been pursued to try and identify a solution to the problem.

3. The 2009 Traffic Signal experiment

In 2009 the County Council undertook a trial placing temporary traffic lights in the High Street to see how effective signals would be in addressing the traffic problems encountered there.

The experiment took place between 27 October and 4 November 2009 and covered both the autumn half term break and the first 2 days of the return to school. The signals were placed on the High Street near its junctions with Star Lane and Weavers Lane.

The experiment was fully monitored in terms of queue formation, rat running to avoid the signals, traffic flow and traffic speeds plus feedback from local residents on what they thought of the experiment and whether they felt it had been a success or not.

Peak hour queue length monitoring was undertaken on four days of the experiment. In the main the queues that formed at the two stop lines were able to clear at the next green stage of the signals unless an event occurred such as refuse collection holding traffic up, coaches letting off passengers or local deliveries.

There was increase in traffic speed through the High Street whilst the experiment was in place although the increase was quite small with the biggest difference being that for northbound traffic where the mean speed increased from 14.8 to 16.8 mph.

During the experiment there was a very small reduction in the amount of traffic travelling through the High Street, i.e. over 24 hours 115 vehicles (2.8%)

Approximately 350 feedback questionnaires were distributed locally within Alfriston and 106 were returned. Over 80% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that action was required at the narrow section of the High Street to make conditions safer for all road users.

Respondents were asked whether they would like to see the traffic signals become permanent. A very small majority (51%) in favour of seeing the traffic signals made permanent whilst 30% were not in favour. The remaining 19 % were not sure.

A number of other traffic management measures were identified that would be needed to ensure any traffic signal solution worked effectively:

- Parking in the High Street north of Star Lane to be made no waiting at any time.
- Consideration should be given to making Star Lane one way, away from the High Street.

- In a permanent solution the traffic signal post at the southern end would need to be the north of Weavers Lane with the stop line to the south, with a 'Keep Clear' across the junction.
- Priority signing is provided to cover the length of North Street between the Square and the bend by West Street car park to address queuing of southbound vehicles that was observed during the experiment.

4. Installation of Barriers in the High Street

In November 2010 Colin Davis, Director of Colin Davis Associates, prepared a report setting out possible solutions to the traffic problems encountered in Alfriston. The report produced by Colin Davis set out an incremental approach to dealing with the traffic issues faced by the village.

The first step of this approach was to seek to address the traffic problem in the High Street. In May 2011, an experimental scheme was introduced which involved placing three temporary barriers in the highway at the edge of the footway to prevent vehicles from driving on it.

Prior to the introduction of the experiment there was a priority flow (give way to opposing vehicles) sign and give way line outside 4 High Street to ensure that those approaching from the south gave way to vehicles coming from the north.

A new give way marking and sign was placed on the northern approach and advanced warning signs were also erected informing people about the change to the road layout.

The experiment had to be curtailed after 4 days due to congestion problem and complaints from members of the public. Colin Davis' original proposal included fixing a convex mirror to a building on the outside of the bend to help drivers see oncoming vehicles however it was not possible to include this within the scope of the experiment.

5. The 2012 Traffic Signal proposals

In 2012, The Project Centre provided technical advice and assisted the SAFE (Save Alfriston For Everyone) committee, a local pressure group seeking a solution to the problems in the High Street, with the preparation of outline plans for a signal scheme, which were then presented at a public meeting.

These outline plans consisted of a selection of proposals that would relieve congestion on the narrow bottleneck in Alfriston High Street, improve the public realm of the village, and also improve the perception of the village safe zone to drivers visiting and passing through the village. The proposals presented at that time are briefly described below:

- Demand Dependant Vehicular Activated Lights to remove the conflicts between traffic in the 'bottleneck' on Alfriston High Street, between Star Lane and Weavers Lane;

- Sympathetic junction surface treatments through the village (i.e. raised junction tables/entry treatments);
- Sympathetic surface treatments to provide informal pedestrian crossing points at several points along the High Street;
- 'Give-Way' village gateways at the northern and southern entry points;
- A 20mph zone in the village.

A key aspect of the design was that only a single signal head was included on each approach to try and mitigate the impact of the introduction of signals on the historic environment. However, this is a departure from standards as it is a requirement that there are two signal heads provided on each approach.

Following the public presentation, a consultation exercise was undertaken by SAFE on the traffic signal proposals. In total 96 feedback forms were completed, with 66% of those who responded supporting the scheme.

6. The establishment of High Street Traffic Management Committee

In 2012 the Parish Council established the High Street Traffic Management Committee (HSTMC) to work with all interested parties including representatives from SAFE and SHARE (another local pressure group seeking a solution based on the principles of shared space) to try and identify a solution to the traffic problem on the High Street.

A Steering Group was set up to oversee a consultancy study and following a competitive tendering exercise a consultant was appointed to take forward the work. Both the South Downs National Park and the County Council sat on the steering group and participated in the selection of the consultant.

7. The 2013 TPA Study

In July 2013, Transport Planning Associates (TPA) supported by Hamilton Baillie Associates were appointed to undertake the work on the development of potential traffic management option for the High Street.

In September 2013 TPA produced their preliminary report which contained outline designs for a one way scheme in the village and a traffic signal scheme in the High Street.

7a) A One Way option

TPA produced information about a one way option which involved making the High Street one way southbound between Star Lane and Weavers Lane. Traffic travelling northbound would use Weavers Lane and Star Lane, both of which would become one way. The TPA report included drawings detailing elements of the scheme and vehicle tracks for the Star Lane/ High Street junction that showed it would not be suitable for use by longer vehicles. The TPA report recognises that longer vehicles would therefore have to use a circuitous diversion route through a number of streets in the village with the need for additional modifications.

The TPA proposals for a one way system prompted significant debate with a number of issues:

- Significant concern about the suitability of the suggested diversion route for longer HGVs around the back of the village which would pass a school and mean the potential loss of on street parking as a result of additional parking controls required to make the route accessible to HGVs and emergency service vehicles;
- Concerns that the HGV diversion route would be used by other vehicles wanting to avoid the High Street, leading to an increase in traffic levels and pollution on the diversion route;
- Despite vehicle tracking information, concern about the ability of longer vehicles to make the left turn out of Star Lane without causing damage to overhanging buildings
- Feasibility of potential changes to entrance and exit arrangements at The Dene car park to enable it to become a through route for longer HGVs at the end of the diversion route, and the potential loss of some car parking spaces. The car park is owned by Wealden District Council whose agreement would need to be obtained.

A member of the Parish Council met with the Wealden District Council to discuss the viability of using The Dene car park as part of the HGV diversion route. This identified that further feasibility design work would be needed to establish what modifications would be required to the layout of the section of the car park, its entrance and exit as well as any potential changes to the surface in the area that would be used by HGVs.

Following the TPA report, consultation was undertaken by the County Council with the emergency services about the potential impact of the one way scheme (and the other proposals) on their response times. Neither the Police nor the Ambulance Service raised any particular concerns about these initial proposals. However, the Fire Service raised concerns about ability of fire tenders to negotiate the left turn out of Star Lane under blue light conditions and potential difficulties for fire tenders using the HGV diversion route. Additional double yellow lines would be needed to ensure unimpeded access along the diversion route. The Fire Service's position was that further analysis of the impact of the proposals would be needed once more detailed proposals had been produced including a site visit and testing of the route using a fire tender.

7b) A traffic signal option

TPA included an outline signal scheme in their report and went on to make a recommendation that this option should not be taken forward.

As set out above other outline design work has been undertaken on potential signal designs. The positioning of the northern signal head at the junction of Star Lane and the High Street was similar to the Project Centre designs. This is where the signal head was also positioned during the County Council 2009 traffic signal experiment. At the southern end the Project Centre had the signal head positioned at the junction of Weavers Lane and the High Street. This is also where the signal head was positioned during the 2009 experiment. In the TPA outline design, the signal head was positioned further north outside No 7a High Street

although the road width here is narrow which would lead to potential difficulties with vehicles waiting at the northbound stop line blocking the path of southbound vehicles.

One of the main concerns in the village about traffic signals and associated control equipment is their impact on the aesthetics of the historic High Street environment.

As set out in the TPA report there are a number of other issues with traffic signals:

- The need to accommodate queuing vehicles at each of the stop lines and the impact of these queues on opposing traffic flow (the carriageway width adjacent to TPA's suggested position for the southern signal heads may be insufficient to enable south bound traffic to pass northbound traffic waiting at the stop line?).
- The impact of the introduction of signals on traffic speeds in the area between the two signal heads.
- The impact of locating the southern signal head at the junction of Weavers Lane and the High Street on the operation of that junction.
- The impact of the location of the signal heads on the adjacent buildings and the impact of any build outs required for the signal heads on pedestrians.
- The need for additional waiting restrictions on the approaches to the signals to ensure they operate effectively.

7c) **Shared space**

Following the production of their report, TPA were also instructed by the Parish Council to produce an outline design for a shared space scheme so that it could be safety audited along with the signal and one way options. TPA had rejected this as an option in their preliminary report as the narrowness of the space combined with an inability to significantly reduce traffic volumes meant that the problem of conflict between vehicles and pedestrians would persist.

TPA chose to include observations about which of the three solutions they felt were most appropriate (even though the brief had not asked them to do so). One of their key conclusions at Paragraph 7.2 of their report was that:

"In our view, the problems and shortcomings associated with the use of traffic signals indicate that this approach should be rejected. They would fail to achieve key elements of the brief, and would significantly erode the remarkable charm and distinctive quality of Alfriston.... In order to focus effort on the essential measures, we recommend that a one-way arrangement.... be worked up in more detail"

In the absence of any constraint on the level of two way traffic flow, TPA also rejected a stand-alone shared space scheme in the narrow section of the High Street. However, they supported the use of shared space elements as part of other potential design options.

The County Council has made it clear that it would not promote a shared space scheme as it would not address the issue of conflict between pedestrians and moving vehicles in the narrow section of the High Street.

8. The disbanding of the High Street Traffic Management Committee

In January 2015 the HSTMC was disbanded at a Parish Council meeting. The minutes of the meeting on 19 January record the following:

“the strength of feeling and divisive nature of the traffic situation amongst parishioners had led to an impasse. Councillors concluded that Alfriston Parish Council have neither the specialist knowledge or the authority to implement change so should report to ESCC (East Sussex County Council) that they have been unable to identify a scheme which most of the parishioners would support and leave ESCC to take whatever action that they deem necessary to manage the High Street traffic”.

9. 2015 Amey Consultants Commission

In 2015, the County Council commissioned Amey Consultants to take forward the work on the development of traffic management option for the High Street. Work on both a one way option and a traffic signal option was progressed.

One of the key issues with the one-way option would be the need for modification to the Dene Car Park owned by Wealden District Council to provide those longer HGVs that would be unable to make the left turn out of Star Lane with a diversion route. Amey produced a schematic layout to illustrate the modifications that would be required to The Dene Car Park to accommodate HGVs including the creation of a carriageway through the car park, significant modification to the entrance and exit arrangements with the loss of approximately six parking spaces. The proposals were shared with Wealden District Council as owners of the car park, who were not prepared to support them owing to concerns about the health and safety of car park users, the impact on local businesses and the loss of parking spaces. As a consequence the one way option could not be taken forward to the recent public consultation exercise. This, along with an explanation on why a shared space was not being consulted upon following the recommendations by consultants TPA to the Parish Council's High Street Traffic Management Committee, was conveyed in the exhibition boards presented to the public.

Work was also progressed on the signal options which took account of the previous design work that had been undertaken. Previous design work had the signals at the northern end of the High Street located just to the north of Star Lane. However this would create problems for deliveries to the George Hotel and coach drop offs at the front of the Star Hotel. As a consequence, the northern set of signals was moved further north towards Waterloo Square and this was the location shown on the plans during the public consultation exercise.

At the southern end of the High Street options were investigated that either involved locating the signals at Weavers Lane or at a location just to the north of this junction outside the Chestnuts Guest House. Both of these options were included in the public consultation exercise with respondents being asked to indicate which of the two possible locations they preferred.

10. Conclusion

The narrowness of a short section of the High Street in the centre of Alfriston combined with a bend in the road results in frequent instances of conflict between vehicles and also conflict between vehicle and pedestrians. Since 2009, a considerable amount of work has been undertaken on the development of potential solutions to address the traffic problems encountered in the narrow section of the High Street. Many people are concerned about this issue which prompted the Parish Council to try and take things forward but opinion remains divided as to the appropriateness of different solutions which had led to an impasse and has inhibited the work on the development of possible solutions.