

Report to: Lead Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment

Date of meeting: 17 June 2019

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: Traffic Management in Alfriston

Purpose: To consider the outcomes of the traffic signals and 20mph speed limit trial schemes carried out in September/October 2018 and to make recommendations on the next steps for traffic management in Alfriston High Street

RECOMMENDATION: The Lead Member is recommended to:

- (1) consider the outcomes of the traffic signals and 20mph speed limit trial schemes;**
 - (2) agree the recommendation not to take forward a permanent traffic signal scheme; and**
 - (3) agree the recommendation to consult on a package of village-wide traffic calming measures.**
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1. Background Information

1.1. In 2016, a public consultation exercise was held by East Sussex County Council (ESCC) to seek views about proposals for traffic management improvements in Alfriston High Street. The measures presented included the introduction of traffic signals at either end of the High Street, with an accompanying 20mph speed limit.

1.2. In September 2016, following the public consultation exercise, the Lead Member resolved that officers develop detailed designs for traffic signals at either end of the narrow section of the High Street, with the full signalisation of Weavers Lane. This was to enable the costs of the scheme to be determined with a view to County Council officers presenting a further report, at a later date, to advise whether a scheme should progress to construction.

1.3. Since the Lead Member meeting, East Sussex Highways (ESH) carried out a comprehensive review of the proposals, as presented at the 2016 consultation event, to confirm the viability of the scheme and take account of the feedback obtained during the consultation process. The results of the initial design review indicated that the location of the traffic signals, near Market Square, would cause significant operational problems around the Square. Traffic modelling carried out in November 2017 on the proposal for traffic signals at Weavers Lane and at Star Lane indicated that whilst average journey times through the village would not significantly increase, predicted queue lengths may still cause congestion around the Market Square.

1.4. In May 2018, the Lead Member resolved that a four-week trial traffic signal scheme be conducted to enable any effects of such measures to be observed in a live traffic situation. Approval for a trial 20mph speed limit was also given but for this to extend four-weeks beyond the initial four-week period so that the community could consider the two measures independently from each other.

2. Supporting Information

2.1. The trial traffic signal scheme was carried out between 17 September and 14 October 2018 with the trial 20mph speed limit continuing for a further four weeks until 11 November 2018. Details and the extent of the trial scheme are contained in Appendix 1.

2.2. The purpose of the trial was to gather evidence to determine the suitability of traffic signals in the High Street. Traffic speed surveys, video monitoring, queue lengths and journey time surveys were recorded during the trial period. Air quality monitoring was also carried out over a three-month period, in advance, during and after the trial scheme. A schedule detailing the data collected is contained within Appendix 2.

2.3. Community feedback formed a key part of the evidence gathering exercise. Approximately 800 letters were sent out to residents and businesses within the village and surrounding area. Members of the public could provide feedback to the proposals via the East Sussex County Council website. Copies of the questionnaire together with scheme proposals were also made available at Alfriston Village Store. To publicise the consultation, a press release was issued to the local newspaper. Notices were also posted around the village to publicise the trial scheme. Details of the consultation were sent to the Local Members for East Sussex County Council, and Alfriston Parish Council as well as other key stakeholder groups. A copy of the consultation letter, together with a copy of the feedback form, is included in Appendix 3.

3. Appraisal

3.1. The analysis of the traffic data gathered from the trial is set out in Appendix 4. Speed data obtained shows 85th percentile traffic speeds did not increase during the trial traffic signal or 20mph speed limit trial when compared with data collected in 2016. In respect of journey times, the data collected before and during the traffic signal trial indicated these did increase during the signal trial. Redistribution of traffic was also assessed. Whilst the temporary traffic signals were in operation, there were increases to daily traffic flow on North Road and The Street (through Litlington Village) and a reduction in traffic flow through Alfriston High Street. This data supported the feedback received during the trial suggesting drivers looked at alternative routes to avoid the traffic signals in the High Street.

3.2. The operation of signals and their impact on Market Square was a key aspect that the trial looked to assess. Following the initial review of the 2016 consultation proposals it was recommended that the northern set of traffic signals be positioned further south, at the Star Lane junction, to mitigate any potential impacts queuing traffic would have on the Square such as redirecting northbound traffic west of the island. Observations during the trial indicated that the traffic signals performed well in clearing queuing traffic in a single cycle of the traffic lights. However, the video observations also demonstrated northbound vehicles were regularly passing on the west side of Market Square because of queuing southbound traffic from Star Lane. This was observed throughout the day and not only during peak periods.

3.3. Whilst the traffic signals did address the issue of vehicles mounting the footway between Star Lane and Weaver Lane junctions, the trial exercise also identified other locations in the High Street and North Street which experienced footway incursion. As Appendix 4 demonstrates, at the Weavers Lane junction the footway was regularly being overrun throughout the day by southbound vehicles.

3.4. Impact to air quality was a concern expressed by the community. A diffusion tube survey was undertaken over a three-month period to measure Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) concentrations across ten sites throughout the village. The results of this assessment are contained within Appendix 5. The findings from the monitoring survey indicated the proposed scheme is unlikely to significantly worsen air quality within Alfriston and is compliant with local and national policy. Owing to the short period over which the survey was conducted, it was not possible to directly correlate changes in monthly mean NO₂ concentrations with specific aspects of the traffic light trials. The lack of a clear trend in measured values suggests that the impact of the scheme is not significant in air quality terms and is not perceptible against

seasonal pollutant variation. However, site observations did indicate localised changes in air quality corresponding to the sections of the High Street where queuing vehicles were regularly present.

3.5. From the public consultation exercise a total of 169 questionnaires were returned. The analysis and summary of all the comments received are set out in Appendix 6. Many responses were negative towards the traffic signals. Whilst it was acknowledged that at times the situation within the area controlled by traffic lights saw some improvements for pedestrians due to greater certainty as to the direction from which traffic will approach, this was at the detriment of other locations in the village, in particular North Street, Weavers Lane and Market Square. Concerns were also made in respect to potential increase in pollution, traffic re-distribution and reduction of safety resulting from perceived increases in vehicles speeds due to the traffic signals. In respect to the 20mph signs, general feedback suggested that this measure alone will have little impact on traffic speed or address vehicles over-running the footways in narrow sections of the High Street. There was also concern that should a 20mph scheme be introduced this would not be enforced.

3.6. Since the May 2018 Lead Member meeting, ESH have been providing updates to key stakeholder groups, namely, South Downs National Park, Alfriston Parish Council, Conserve Alfriston Group (CAG), and the Safe Alfriston for Everyone (SAFE) group. In addition, ESH have been in communication with the representatives from businesses/traders in the village together with the 'Alfriston Emergency Group', who provided the County Council with video footage they took during the trial. Many of these stakeholder groups provided separate feedback. CAG also conducted their own public consultation exercise and carried out their own traffic data collection during the trial. Of the feedback received from businesses, impact on delivery access was the main concern raised, particularly for those situated near Star Lane junction. In addition, it was felt that congestion resulting from the traffic signals also gave a negative image of the village, particularly to visitors. Comments were received to indicate some visitors would not return to the village due to the congestion issues they experienced. The feedback from key stakeholders was reflective of the responses ESH obtained from their own consultation exercise. The stakeholder feedback received is set out in Appendix 7.

3.7. In summary, the results of the trials indicate there was a reduction in vehicles overrunning the footway in the High Street between Star Lane and Weavers Lane junction, although, this was at the detriment to other parts of the village where footway over-running and queuing vehicles were observed. Measures such as converting Star Lane to one-way (westbound) would improve the operation of the traffic signals by reducing the number of vehicle turning movements at the junction. However, the distance between the Star Lane junction and Market Square is not sufficient (only seven car lengths) to allow southbound vehicles to queue. In turn southbound vehicles regularly block Market Square and impede northbound traffic flow resulting in re-distribution of traffic and at times congestion.

3.8. Solutions to address footway overrun though the High Street have been explored for over 10 years. The historic nature of the village severely constrains road space and reduces visibility for opposing road users. Various options to manage opposing traffic flows, such as one-way systems or priority working have been investigated but none of these have been considered viable. To date traffic signals are the only option that can address this issue, however from the evidence obtained from the trial scheme it is considered this measure is not viable given the significant negative impact it creates in other parts of the village.

3.9. In view of this it is recommended that a traffic signal solution is not implemented. Instead an alternative package of village-wide measures should be progressed and a consultation held to allow the community to consider. These measures could include the introduction of a village-wide 20mph speed limit to promote an environment more conducive for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians. In addition, following the evidence gathered through the trial, changes to the existing waiting restrictions (single

yellow line) in the High Street north of Star Lane and into Market Square should be consulted on. The temporary restriction of parking in the High Street during the trial proved a necessity whilst the traffic signals were in operation, but during the 20mph speed limit only trial, the removal of parking also seemed to improve traffic flow through the centre of the village. There would also be an opportunity for the village to contribute to these proposals with additional, enhanced, village gateway signing.

3.10. As well as the measures proposed for the village, ESCC will explore options to introduce improvements to signing on the A259 to further discourage HGVs passing through Alfriston. The County Council will also continue to engage with Highways England (HE) to ensure propose that enhancements to HGV signing are included as part of the package of smaller scale improvements that HE are bringing forward for the A27 between Lewes and Polegate, which include improvements to the Drusillas roundabout.

3.11. Whilst it is acknowledged that these measures will not address the specific issues that the traffic signal solution had looked to achieve, these interventions would aim to improve driver awareness of the environment, help improve traffic flow, whilst helping to address the ongoing issue of unauthorised HGV traffic passing through the village.

4. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation

4.1. Whilst the results of the traffic signal trial indicate there was a reduction in vehicles overrunning the footway in the High Street between Star Lane and Weavers Lane junction, this was to the detriment of other parts of the village where footway incursions and queueing traffic was observed.

4.2. It is therefore recommended that Lead Member for Transport and Environment agrees that a traffic signal scheme is not progressed and instead agrees that a package of village-wide measures, as detailed in this report, to be taken forward and consulted on.

4.3. The findings of this proposed consultation will be reported back to Lead Member for Transport and Environment for further consideration as part of the decision making process.

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LOCAL MEMBER

Councillor Stephen Shing

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Lead Member Report dated September 2016 and May 2018