

Report to: Lead Member for Transport and Environment
Date of meeting: 21 November 2022
By: Director of Communities, Economy, and Transport
Title: Petition to improve safety measures at the junction of the A267 with the B2102 at Cross in Hand, Heathfield.
Purpose: To consider a petition asking that the County Council urgently improves safety measures to help save the lives of drivers and pedestrians at the junction of the A267 with the B2102 at Cross in Hand.

Recommendations: *The Lead Member is recommended to advise the petitioners that:*

- (1) following the outcome of the detailed appraisal process, they will be informed whether the scheme has been assessed as a high priority for potential inclusion in the 2023/24 capital programme of local transport improvements which will be considered by the Lead Member at a meeting in March 2023; and**
 - (2) following speed surveys undertaken along the A267/A265 between Cross in Hand to Heathfield, the resultant assessment has identified that the existing 40mph speed limit remains the most appropriate and safest speed limit for this road.**
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1 Background Information

1.1 A petition was presented to the Chairman at the County Council meeting on 18 July 2022 by Councillor Chris Dowling on behalf of residents concerned about road safety at the junction of the A267 with the B2102 at Cross in Hand, Heathfield. The petition requested that *“the council urgently improve safety measures at the junction of the A267 with the B2102 at Cross in Hand”*. A plan showing the location of the junction is attached in Appendix 1.

1.2 A copy of the petition is available in the Members’ Room. Standing Orders provide that where the Chairman considers it appropriate, petitions are considered by the relevant Committee or Lead Member and a spokesperson for the petitioners is invited to address the Committee. The Chairman has referred this petition to the Lead Member for Transport and Environment.

2. Supporting Information

Current situation and road safety record

2.1 The junction of the A267 with the B2102 at Cross in Hand lies to the west of the town of Heathfield and is within a 40mph speed limit. A number of facilities are located along the A267 in the vicinity of the junction including a petrol station, Village Hall and Health Club on the north side and the Bowling & Tennis Club, Recreation Ground and Public House on the south side. There is a pedestrian refuge island with tactile paving on the A267 at the eastern kerblines of the B2102 to assist pedestrians crossing the road. The A267 is also on a bus route with bus stops located in laybys on both sides of the A267 to the east of the junction with the B2102.

2.2 Crash data supplied by Sussex Police for the most recent three-year period up to 31 July 2022 records two personal injury crashes at the junction of the A267 with the B2102 and two personal injury crashes approximately 50 – 80 metres to the east of the junction at the exit from the petrol station/access road for the Health Club. One of the personal injury crashes east of the junction was a pedestrian fatality on 22 March 2022 which gave rise to the petition. There are an average of 18,500 vehicle movements per day through this junction which equates to over 20 million vehicle movements through the junction in the same three-year period.

2.3 From the exit of the petrol station and access road for the Health Club eastwards to the 30mph speed limit in Heathfield, approximately 1.7 kilometres, there have been two personal injury crashes reported to Sussex Police in the most recent three-year period. A plan showing the location of the crashes is attached as Appendix 2.

Previous studies and local safety improvements

2.4 A significant junction improvement scheme at the junction of the A267 with the B2102, has been looked at several times in the past, following its initial identification within the Local Area Transport Strategy (LATS) for Heathfield, published in 2004. The most recent study of this junction was undertaken in 2014/15 and resulted in two options going forward to a more detailed evaluation.

2.5 The option of a roundabout was rejected due to the need for additional land and redevelopment of the adjacent petrol station, resulting in an estimated cost, at the time, of more than £1 million. A traffic signal-controlled junction was also considered but addressing concerns about safe access into the petrol station and the Health Club resulted in cost estimates of more than £500,000. It was also identified that a signal-controlled junction would result in excessive queue lengths on the approaches to the junction. The conclusion of this study stated, *'having considered the traffic flow impacts, potential costs, safety impacts and public acceptability of a range of proposals both at the A267/B2102 junction and on the surrounding road network, there is no viable scheme that the County Council could promote at this current time'*. The conclusions of the study were presented to Heathfield and Waldron Parish Council and the County Councillors for the Heathfield and Cross-in Hand areas at the time who agreed with the study's recommendations.

2.6 The cost of any significant junction improvement scheme in today's economic climate is likely to be double the previous 2015 estimates with a traffic signalised junction costing approximately £1m and £2 million for a roundabout.

2.7 The Road Safety Team identified this junction (and surrounding area) as part of their 2019 annual assessment of crash sites (defined as four or more crashes occurring in the previous three years within a 50-metre radius). A study of the causes of the crashes found that drivers were experiencing difficulties judging traffic movements through the junction area. As a result, several additional measures were installed in September 2021 to help highlight the junction arrangement and improve driver awareness. These measures included the introduction of red surfacing in the central hatching, renewing the existing road markings and redesigning the advanced direction signs. These measures will be monitored over the next 3 years to assess their impact.

Scheme Assessment Process

2.8 The County Council has a limited amount of funding to develop local transport improvements and the Council needs to ensure that resources are targeted to those schemes which will be of greatest benefit to local communities. To help prioritise the numerous requests received for improvements, ESCC developed a two-stage process to determine which schemes should be considered for funding through the Council's capital programme for local transport improvements.

2.9 The first stage is a high level sift which assesses the level to which the scheme would contribute towards delivering the County's Local Transport Plan (LTP) objectives – improve economic competitiveness and growth; improve safety, health and security; tackle climate change; improve accessibility and enhance social inclusion and improve quality of life.

2.10 Subject to meeting the high level sift benchmark score, schemes are then progressed to a second, detailed appraisal stage. This detailed appraisal assesses at a more granular level the extent to which the scheme would fulfil the Local Transport Plan objectives and its benefits, its relative value for money by assessing these benefits against the estimated County Council funding required to deliver the scheme, and the potential risks associated with its delivery. In appraising the scheme's benefits, the assessment considers the impact the scheme would have upon the local community, whether the proposals feature within a known area for regeneration, and also whether any sources of external funding are available, such as development contributions.

2.11 The outcomes of the detailed appraisal create a prioritised list of schemes for potential inclusion in the capital programme of local transport improvements. The number of new schemes entering the programme on an annual basis will be dependent on several factors including the number of ongoing scheme commitments within the current programme, the funding associated with these that must be taken forward, time limited funding associated with particular improvements, as well as the need to ensure that the scheme programme has a mix of schemes of different sizes and types to ensure that the overall programme is deliverable.

Scheme assessment outcome

2.12 Following the pedestrian fatality and receipt of the petition, the scheme has been assessed through the Council's scheme prioritisation framework outlined in paragraphs 2.8 to 2.10. The introduction of junction and pedestrian improvements met the high level sift benchmark score meaning that the scheme is progressed to a detailed appraisal. Detailed appraisals are undertaken each year between December and January ahead of the formulation of the following year's annual capital programme of local transport improvements.

2.13 Until the detailed appraisal process has been completed to inform next year's capital programme of local transport improvements, the relative priority of this scheme against all the other schemes being considered for inclusion in the programme has yet to be determined.

Potential alternative local safety improvements

2.14 Whilst the petition has not specifically requested the existing 40mph speed limit on the A267 at Cross in Hand is reduced to 30mph, requests have been received following the pedestrian fatality. This includes recent correspondence from Heathfield and Waldron Parish Council.

2.15 Many people believe the introduction of a lower speed limit will automatically slow traffic down, however, it is recognised nationally that most drivers travel at the speed they consider to be safe for the conditions of the road, based on their assessment of the local environment. There are several factors that are taken into consideration when assessing a length of road for a speed limit, with the predominant factors being the character and appearance of the road, the level of visible frontage development and the speed of traffic using the road. A copy of our approved speed limit policy is attached as Appendix 3.

2.16 The research that has been carried out nationally indicates that speed limits that are introduced with signs and lines alone only reduce the average speed of traffic by about 1mph to 2mph, and then only when it appears obvious to the driver why the limit has been imposed. Setting a speed limit that is significantly below the speed that most drivers consider appropriate only leads to them being widely ignored. This produces a large margin between the slowest and fastest vehicles which is recognised as a significant contributor to crashes. A road is generally safer when all drivers are travelling at, or close to, the posted speed limit.

2.17 A seven-day speed survey was commissioned within the existing 40mph speed limit on the A265 to the west of Pages Hill between the 21 and 28 September 2022. Average speeds recorded over 24 hours were 35 mph in both directions with 85th percentile speeds of 39mph eastbound and 40mph westbound (the 85th percentile speed is the speed at or below which 85% of traffic is travelling, or viewed another way, the speed only 15% of drivers exceed). The County Council has a permanent speed counter positioned on the A267 at Cross in Hand in the vicinity of the Bowling & Tennis Club and during the same seven-day period the average speed recorded over 24 hours was 37 mph in both directions with 85th percentile speeds of 43mph in both directions.

2.18 Speed limits should be a minimum of 600 metres in length and should not be introduced to address isolated areas of crashes. The speeds which have been recorded indicate that the 40mph speed limit is well adhered to and is the most appropriate and safest speed limit for this part of the A267/A265. There are some services and development on the stretch of the A267 through Cross in Hand, however the visible frontage development is sporadic and mainly set back from the road so a driver can identify with a 40mph speed limit. Therefore, the existing speeds and level of visible frontage development does not support the introduction of a lower 30mph speed limit.

3 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 Following the pedestrian fatality near the A267/B2102 junction in Cross in Hand, the introduction of junction and pedestrian improvements have been further assessed using the County Council's scheme prioritisation process for local transport improvements. The scheme has met the benchmark score through stage 1, the high level sift of the scheme assessment process meaning it progresses to detailed appraisal (stage 2). The detailed appraisal assesses at a more granular level the extent to which the scheme would fulfil the LTP objectives, its relative value for money, and the potential risks associated with its delivery. The detailed appraisal process is undertaken between December and January each year ahead of the developing the next year's capital programme of local transport improvements.

3.2 Therefore, it is recommended that the Lead Member for Transport and Environment advises the petitioners that following the outcome of the detailed appraisal process, they will be informed whether the scheme has been assessed as a high priority for potential inclusion in the 2023/24 capital programme of local transport improvements which will be considered by the Lead Member at a meeting in March 2023.

3.3 In addition, the Lead Member is recommended to advise the petitioners that following speed surveys undertaken along the A267/A265 between Cross in Hand to Heathfield, the resultant assessment has identified that the existing 40mph speed limit remains the most appropriate and safest speed limit for this road. The Lead Member is also recommended to advise the petitioners that the junction has recently been treated as part of the Road Safety Team's annual assessment process. It will continue to be monitored as part of the County Council's commitment to reducing the number of killed and seriously injured on our road network through the Local Safety Scheme identification work.

RUPERT CLUBB

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LOCAL MEMBER

Councillor Chris Dowling

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None