

SPECIAL MEETING TO DISCUSS COMMUNITY CONCERNS RELATING TO THE A49 SOUTH (MUCH BIRCH)

27th JULY 2010

Present

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| Colin Howard | Head Teacher Much Birch School |
| Sharon Davies | Concerned Parent (Much Birch) |
| Menna Swift | Much Birch Parish Council |
| John Jones | Chairman, Much Birch Parish Council |

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| Ivan Beavis | Highways Agency Area 9 |
| Serena Howell | Highways Agency Area 9 (Route Performance Manager) |
| Rebecca Hamilton | Amey (Highways Agency Area 9) Safety Engineering Team) |
| Paul Grosvenor | Amey (Highways Agency Area 9) Interim Network Improvement Manager) |

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| Ruth Kinsella | Amey (Herefordshire) |
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| Richard Ball | Herefordshire Council (Assistant Director Highways, Transportation and Community Services) |
| Clive Hall | Herefordshire Council (Highway Network Manager) |
| Cllr Richard Smith | Herefordshire Council (Pontrilas Ward) |
| Cllr Jo Fishley | Herefordshire Council (Valletts Ward) |
| Chris Bucknell | Herefordshire Partnership |

Apologies

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| Mrs K Greenow | Clerk to Much Birch Parish Council |
| Chris Gooding | Herefordshire Partnership (Community Led Planning Coordinating & Commissioning Officer) |

The meeting had come about following concerns raised at PACT (Partners and Communities Together) meetings held at Much Birch over the past 2 years. It had been hoped that the Highways Agency could attend the community meeting held in May 2010 but this had not proved possible due to resource issues on the part of the Highways Agency. Richard Ball, Assistant Director (Highways, Transportation and Community Services) had attended that meeting where it was agreed to arrange a special public meeting to discuss the issues at Much Birch.

Cllr Richard Smith welcomed the Highways Agency and others present, saying Herefordshire Council Officers, the Cabinet Member for Highways and others shared the very real, genuine and serious concerns of the local community. The perception of the community was that Herefordshire Council and the Highways Agency had failed to acknowledge and act on concerns for the safety of those who live near and/or those who travel on the A49 between Hereford and Ross on Wye. The purpose of the meeting was to find a way to work with the Highways Agency to put in place actions which would address these concerns.

A petition has been submitted to the Highways Agency (via Herefordshire Council). The Highways Agency has responded to the petition but so far has not acknowledged Cllr Smith's earlier request for sight of the Agency's report on speed limits on the A49 South.

Issues

- Congestion outside Much Birch School when parents drop off and collect their children. Because of this some parents park in Tump Lane and then cross the A49 with their children. The school has 190 children, 30% of whom come from out of the catchment area which means a lot are brought to school in cars.
- There have been two serious similar incidents, Mrs Jane Powell in October 2009 and Mrs Sharon Davies in February this year. Mrs Davies recounted her and her child's "near miss" with an HGV whilst crossing the main road. Mrs Davies leaves her car in Tump Lane to relieve congestion outside school, but the complex junction (need to look 5 ways) is difficult for pedestrians to negotiate. The back draft from the HGV had nearly caused her child to be sucked into the road.
- A car park near the school will solve many of the issues as it would get all of the school related cars away from the A49. Land has been identified but the planning application has been refused. Cllr Smith expressed the view that the application had been mishandled by Herefordshire Council. There is a need to follow this up and to move it forward as quickly as possible.
- The situation is made worse by the school buses all arriving at the same time and from all directions. Also the Number 38 bus has been put back 10 minutes which means it also clashes with the school run. A request to alter the schedule of the rural buses had been refused.

The needs of the local community are clear

- Clearance of the overgrown footpath on both sides of the A49, near Tump Lane. It is a very narrow footpath which is made worse by lack of maintenance.
- Railings (safety barriers) on both sides of the A49 to stop children being sucked into the road
- Serious and urgent review of the speed limit on the stretch of the A49 by the school.
- Speed enforcement. It was noted that West Mercia Police have been very responsive in terms of carrying out speed enforcement activities to date.
- A light controlled crossing (it was confirmed that Pelican/Toucan crossings needed to be operational 24/7 and could not just function at school times as had been originally suggested).

Ivan Beavis from the Highways Agency outlined some national statistics regarding road safety. Whilst safety statistics in the West Midlands were improving it was acknowledged data showed that the A49 south of Hereford needed to improve. Ivan stressed that although a range of solutions to some of the issues had been identified there was no funding available to carry out the work. It was important to move forward with the preparatory work so that if money did become available (which it often did), work could start immediately. He added that the Highways Agency was totally committed to finding funding to address the issues on the A49 South. There was a value management process which the Highways Agency needed to go through but Ivan did not see this as too much of a hurdle in relation to the A49 as the work would be justified on accident savings.

Rebecca Hamilton (Amey (Highways Agency Area 9) Safety Engineering Team) put forward the results of the investigation she had done on the A49 South of Hereford and the detail for Much Birch. The footpaths were overgrown and maintenance work had only been partly completed, an instruction to complete this work would be issued to Amey ASAP. Amey Hereford also agreed that the vegetation along Tump Lane and Kingsthorpe Lane would be cut back to ensure adequate visibility. Rebecca confirmed that the measures could be completed quickly subject to the VM process and if resources were available. Measures such as moving the junction warning sign away to make the School sign more visible are included in the proposals.

Rebecca confirmed that they felt it was not safe for any 10-11 year old or younger child to cross the A49 or a similar road alone. The proposal was to put in measures that would ensure speeds were maintained at the posted speed limit, such as slow markings, central hatchings to discourage overtaking and some narrowing of the carriageway either side of the junction. A drop crossing (where there was good visibility) was also suggested.

Discussions with the Safer Roads Partnership had taken place and enhanced speed enforcement action would be put in place. A light controlled crossing was not being recommended for a number of reasons, mainly related to the potential level and frequency of use.

Cllr Smith said that the local community in general and Parish Councillors in particular were very clear that there needed to be a light controlled crossing by the school. He said that if it was now being suggested this was not justified the issue should be referred back to the Regional Director. Richard Ball agreed to report back to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation on HCC procedure for dealing with petitions as it did not appear to have been done to the agreed protocol. Richard Ball agreed to consider raising the issue of the controlled crossing with the Highways Agency Regional Director.

A number of other options had been discussed. HCC confirmed that local people or the school could not operate as a school crossing patrol this was not an option due to road safety and insurance issues.

It was felt that Herefordshire Council was in a position to help with the car park issue by supporting the school in the development of a school travel plan, including the car park, which had the potential to improve the school traffic situation and solve a number of the issues. Richard Ball agreed to follow this up with the Planning Department and agreed that this option should be pursued in parallel with the measures being suggested by the Highways Agency.

The Highways Agency report on the A49 South would be finalised by the end of August 2010 and by the end of September it was proposed to have a costed package of measures which could be taken through the valuation process in October. This would result in a package of measures being ready for implementation in 2010/11. It was stressed that implementation would rely on funding becoming available. The Highways Agency confirmed that the final report would be issued to Herefordshire Council at the end of September 2010.

The meeting ended with all parties acknowledging committing to moving things forward as soon as possible.

The Herefordshire Partnership
Tel: 01432 261792
E:mail hfdpartnership@herefordshire.gov.uk
www.herefordshirepartnership.com