

Report of Beech Road Safety Working Group to Parish Council Meeting - 21 June 2021

1) Since my last report to the Parish Council BRSWG has met on 25 May 2021 and on 15 June. The minutes of the first meeting have been sent to Parish Clerk; those relating to the second meeting are in preparation and are expected to go to the Parish Clerk later this week.

2) I am pleased to report that we have now heard from Ian Janes, the road safety officer at Hampshire Highways who has been friendly towards our scheme and who both sponsored and paid for our proposals to be considered by the Safety Audit team. Given that there are only two officers on that team which examines all the highways projects in Hampshire, we have heard back remarkably quickly. The Feasibility Audit report has been received from Hampshire Highways and the only objections raised are for the last 400 m section of Kings Hill. Subject to Parish Council approval, we have decided to drop this section, and all points west, from our current proposals to HH and treat those elements as a separate project to be considered later, after consultation with Beech residents. In a subsequent telephone conversation with Ian Gibson, Ian Janes indicated that there were unlikely to be any further safety concerns from HCC at this stage and that the next phase would be a safety audit of our detailed proposals for the whole scheme. This should include accurately dimensioned plans of the roads and footways, but not detailed constructional plans. It is expected that this will include a new topographical survey if no suitable plans exist and interaction with the utility companies in relation to drains, manhole covers, underground services etc that may be affected. Ian Janes made it clear that HH could not undertake this work for us or pay for it to be done and that this would be our responsibility. The road survey and preparation of the plans will require the services of a suitable consultant, subject to Parish Council approval.

This outcome represents success in that an in principle question has not been raised by the Audit Safety team regarding our plans for an on-road footway. This does not mean that questions will not be raised when we submit the required detailed drawings, but it appears unlikely that the on-road nature of important elements of our solution will fall as a matter of principle.

As flagged up in my last report, it is now clear that moving to the next stage of the project will require further drawings and quite likely the expenditure of some money on a consultant who could provide the necessary drawings. We will need in principle support from the Parish Council to move to this stage and seek competitive bids for this work. Ian Janes has made it clear that HCC will not pay for this work.

3) BRSWG believes that it should seek to engage with the village in a consultative process. Our vision is that this process would involve an exhibition and drop in at the Village Hall, in which villagers would have the opportunity to provide feedback. This would involve expenditure of some £80 for hire of the Village Hall annex. We would hope to link to a social evening when reasonable numbers are gathered at the hall to put on an exhibition, perhaps at the end of July or August. We would also need to provide some A1 sized sheets on which to show the proposals. This would also involve a charge. My I suggest a budget of £200 to cover all costs.

Action - Please would parish councillors approve both the principle of the consultative process and the outline expenditure of £200.

3) As promised in my last report, I attach a draft set of messages for both external and internal audiences and a list of those to whom we should target those messages. We welcome feedback on both the draft messages and on the targets. I would emphasise that this will remain a working document and that as we move from one stage of the project to the next, the messages and targets are likely to change. I must also emphasise that the idea behind this document is to provide a ready source for Parish Councillors when they are in communication with potential targets for our messaging. We want in principle approval for our messages. Thereafter, it is absolutely vital that we ensure consistency in our messaging and observe discipline when talking to our audiences about the project. Mixed messaging risks undermining the whole project, particularly when it comes to finding external sources of funding.

4) As signalled in my last report, on 1 June 2021 the Chair of the Parish Council and myself held a useful meeting with Sergeant Rob Jones, who took over community policing in Alton last November. There were four main outcomes:

- a) Police numbers are up at Alton - we are now getting back to the sort of numbers which we can reasonably expect to maintain as recruitment continues.
- b) A new liaison officer, PC Vince Love, with wide experience of rural policing through his work with CountryWatch, has been appointed. This will enable better communication with Neighbourhood Watch.
- c) PCSO Gemma McKeown has been appointed to coordinate Community SpeedWatch activities locally.
- d) Following vigorous campaigning Beech is being prioritised for enforcement activity. PS Jones intends to continue to send an officer with a hand held camera to Beech on a sporadic basis, which he believes has more impact on speeding motorists than regular patrols.

5) On Sunday 20 June, Charles Cockburn attended a 90 minute webinar run by "20's Plenty for Us" for campaigners. The strategy is to encourage campaigners to point out to Highways authorities that making and implementing the decision to impose 20mph on towns and villages across their area is much more cost effective than doing it piecemeal. Meanwhile, at the Central Government level, the campaign is setting out to create a positive environment for Councils

wishing to pursue policies to reduce speeds to 20mph. It is clear that even where there is no enforcement of a 20mph speed limit, speeds still come down. This is echoed in the experience of Selborne Hampshire, where enforcement is minimal but speeds have diminished generally.

Apparently, Government policy is that any community that wants it can ask for 20mph and the County is then obliged to listen to what the community has to say and act upon it. For that reason, it may be worth considering a referendum on 20mph in the village, with a view to presenting the outcome as evidence to HCC. I am looking for examples of this process taking place and will report back next month.

6) I am delighted to report that, following up on his earlier promise, Mark Kemp-Gee, our newly re-elected county councillor for Alton Rural has responded with an email making it clear that he is friendly to the notion of 20mph, but with the caveat that the money is not there to pay for new schemes. I have received a response from our EHDC councillor, Tony Costigan stating that he does not support 20mph based upon the fact that reminder discs are a waste of money. One of the matters that emerged from the 20s Plenty for Us webiinare, is that since new Government guidance was issued in 2016, it is no longer necessary to have multiple 20mph reminder discs - just a roundel at each end of the 20mph speed limit. I will respond accordingly to Cllr Costigan.

Ends

Charles Cockburn

Chair, Beech Road Safety Working Group
21 June 2021