

# The A28 speed limit review: Bethersden (2009)

## Background

- The government is currently drawing up plans to cut rural speed limits on single carriageway roads. The intention of lowering speed limits is not only about reducing deaths or the seriously injured but is also about ensuring a better quality of life for those in rural areas.
- In August 2006 the Department for Transport (DfT) issued new guidance on setting local speed limits (Circular 01/2006). With the guidance was an instruction to all County Councils to review all the speed limits on all the A and B roads within their counties and implement any changes by 2011.
- Kent Highway Services, the transport arm of Kent County Council, commissioned Jacobs Engineering UK Ltd (Jacobs) to review the A and B roads in Kent on a phased approach.
- This section of the A28 is included within Area 1 with Jacobs proposals, being released to Parish Councils for consultation in May 2009, with responses due in by 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2009.
- For many years, Bethersden Parish Council and the residents of Bethersden have been campaigning to reduce the number of accidents along this stretch of the A28 after years of numerous accidents, including many fatalities.
- At the June 2009 meeting of Bethersden Parish Council, a working group was formed from seven Bethersden residents, all of whom lived along the A28, and two members of the Parish Council.

## Working Group

The working group met during June and July 2009 to:

- discuss Jacobs proposals,
- identify and discuss evidence available,
- determine how to get further evidence, and
- agree a counter proposal.

The group focussed on:

- the areas of the Jacobs proposal that were inconsistent with the KCC Road Safety Plan and DfT guidance Circular 01/2006,
- vulnerability and safety of Bethersden residents that live along the A28.

The group has worked over 200 hours on this.

## Methodology

The working group only had a short period of time to collate information and respond to Jacobs proposals. The following approach was taken to gather information on the A28 in the parish of Bethersden:

1. **Density of traffic:** A physical count of the traffic on the A28 of one hour durations to identify the number and types of vehicles travelling along the A28 and using the various junctions in and near the village.
2. **Questionnaire:** A fact finding questionnaire was designed aimed at residents of properties along the A28 Bethersden from Furner Farm to Gascoigne Corner.  
The questionnaire sought to discover:
  - Profile of residents, vehicle movements, social activities and use of village amenities.
  - Businesses and associated vehicle movements
  - Comments were also sought regarding concerns relating to speed of traffic and its impact on them.A letter signed by the Chair of the Parish Council, giving the reason for the questionnaire, was prepared and a copy provided to each resident along the A28 who was interviewed.
3. **Photographs:** A series of photographs along the route to show the nature of the road and the hazards that residents face daily.
4. **Movements relating to schools and pupils:** Enquires at the local schools to identify pupil movements, method of transport, and bus pick up and drop off points to the village primary school and the secondary schools in Ashford and Tenterden.
5. **Accidents:** Information was sought on both reportable and non-reportable accidents along this stretch of the A28
6. **Correspondence with authorities:** Previous correspondence from residents regarding speed limits and traffic movements was sought.

# Key Findings

## 1. Density of Traffic

We established that the density of traffic along this stretch of the A28 is high, and Kent Highway Services have confirmed that there are areas of crash clusters along the A28 which need to be addressed.

- The A28 is a major through road, linking Ashford to Tenterden attracting HGVs, service buses, commuters and tourist traffic.
- 4,000 vehicle movements generated by the residents exiting and entering properties.
- 4,000 vehicle movements generated by the businesses in the same area.
- The density of traffic along the A28 at a rate of one vehicle every 4.8 seconds during peak periods.
- The nature of the road represents a serious hazard for the residents of this village due to its width, narrow or no pavements, bends, junctions/accesses, no pedestrian crossings.
- The junction of the A28 with Forge Hill (Forge Corner) is of significant concern as this is a major crossing for pedestrians to enter the village, such as the primary school and shops.
- The service bus route is hourly, using Forge Hill and School Road.
- 75% of residents have poor visibility for vehicles exiting their driveway.
- The number of accidents along the A28 is abnormally high.

## 2. Questionnaire

The results of the questionnaire show that we have a fully integrated community.

- 22% of the adults in the parish of Bethersden live along this road.
- 89% use the village shop.
- 59% of children attending the play and primary schools walk.
- Post is delivered by bicycle to 56% of the houses.
- The short stretch of the A28 that passes through the parish of Bethersden is densely populated. The section from Big Tree Farm to Beult Cottage meets the criteria for a and as such a 30mph speed limit is appropriate in this section.

Comments from the residents of Bethersden show an overwhelming concern for the existing speed limit. Many added to this by stating that crossing the A28 with children or for the elderly is like taking your life into your own hands. They are terrified.

82 residents provided comments. This is 73% of the occupied houses along this section of the A28.

- 43 are concerned by the speed of the traffic
- 27 residents were concerned about crossing the road
- 26 expressed concern over the number of accidents
- 18 have issues when entering/exiting their properties
- 16 believe the density/speed of traffic on the A28 has impacted their quality of life
- 14 had concerns on pedestrian safety
- 3 have written directly to the KCC/police/local MP
- 1 petition has been raised asking by a reduced speed in the vicinity of "The Bungalows"

## 3. Vulnerability, risk and quality of life

The questionnaire sought to identify factors which affect the residents' sense of vulnerability, risk to which they were exposed to and the impact on their quality of life. The Jacobs report identified that the use of the sites by vulnerable road users is low. The findings from our questionnaire contradict this.

The key factors impacting on the vulnerability of residents are:

- The lack of a safe pedestrian crossing point anywhere along this stretch of the A28, and in particular at Forge Corner.
- Density of traffic: particularly at peak times.
- Some residents drive to the school and shops as they feel safer driving.
- Narrow and at times, non-existent, pavements add to this sense of vulnerability.
- Residents talk about feeling trapped.
- High number of accidents. At the time of conducting the review, there were an additional five: one serious.
- Residents are constantly subjected to vehicles crashing into their properties.
- No cycle ways or wide verges so cyclists, pedestrians and horse riders all risk their lives.
- 10 public footpaths and bridleways with direct access to the A28.

**All these factors demonstrate anxiety and stress at levels that are unacceptable.**

## 4. Accidents

Many accidents, mostly non-reportable, occur along this stretch of the A28, causing much stress and anxiety to the residents.

For example:

- 31 accidents along The Bungalows between Furner Farm and The Cot in the period mostly from 2004 to 2009. In the period leading up to date there have been four fatalities.
- 23 accidents have taken place at in the vicinity of Spratts Barn during the period from September 2004 to July 2009. Most of these were non-reportable.
- At Bull Bridge:
  - Eight vehicles have crashed through the fence belonging to Beult Cottage with an equal number on the opposite side of the road.
  - Bull Bridge Farm has suffered many accidents.
  - There have been three fatalities on the bridge itself.
- At Gascoigne Corner, the property immediately at this point has been subjected to numerous accidents over several years. For example, from October 2006 to January 2007, 32 cars went through the hedge into the front garden of the property. Most were non-reportable.
- 29 **reported** accidents in the 5 years ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009 including 3 fatalities, along the stretch from Beult Cottage to the eastern boundary of the parish with Great Chart.

## 5. Meeting of the Joint Transportation Board (JTB) held on 30th June 2009

The Chair of the working group attended a meeting of the Joint Transportation Board on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009.

At the meeting the board recommended that the current national speed limit along from Beult Cottage to the classic car garage in High Halden be reduced to 40mph immediately.

## 6. Businesses

The businesses generate a total of 4,230 vehicle movements a week, entering and exiting their properties.

## Conclusion

Bethersden is a thriving village, with a strong community.

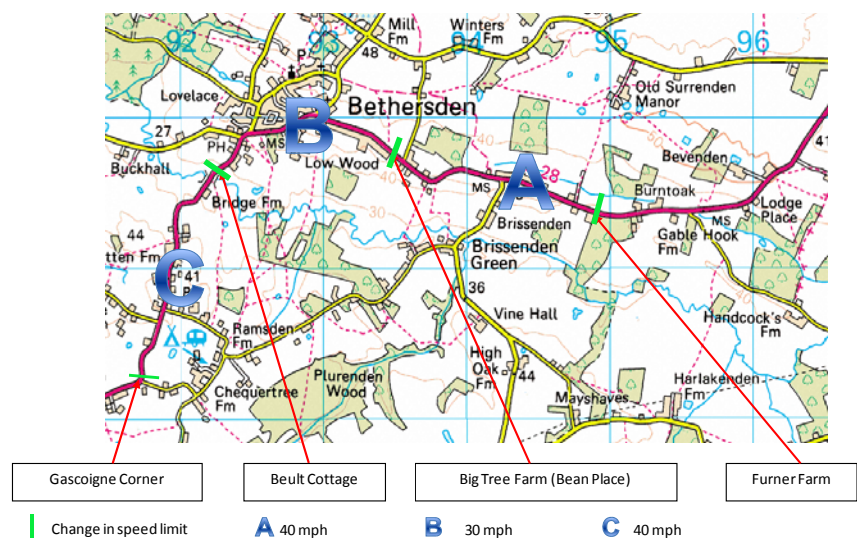
From the information that we have obtained we have established that residents along the A28 are constantly subjected to unacceptable risks as a result of the density and speed of traffic.

This has a significant impact on their daily lives generating a sense of vulnerability, anxiety and stress.

## Recommendations

The working group recommend the following:

- 40mph speed limit from Furner Farm to Big Tree Farm (formerly known as Bean Place).**
- 30mph from Big Tree Farm to below Beult Cottage.**
- 40mph from below Beult Cottage to Gascoigne Corner where it enters the Parish of High Halden, as ratified by the Joint Transportation Board (JTB) on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009.**



## Justifications

Below are our justifications for the speed limits that we have recommended:

### Section A: 40mph from Furner Farm to Big Tree Farm

- Currently 60mph from Furner Farm to east of Spratts Barn and then 40mph from east of Spratts Barn to Beult Cottage.
- Jacobs propose that this section should be 50mph.
- We disagree with Jacobs proposal, recommending that the **existing 40mph section is extended eastwards to Furner Farm**.
  - Helps to reinforce the 30mph stretch (Section B).
  - No pavements, and poor and in some places, non-existent, verges for pedestrians to walk/stand on.
  - Numerous accidents, mostly non-reportable, at Spratts Barn corner.
    - Just inside current 40mph area, traffic from Ashford has not slowed down sufficiently to take the second bend. Traffic travelling towards Ashford fails to negotiate the bend.
    - Too many distractions approaching this bend from Ashford:
      - Speed camera sign
      - Sharp right hand bend sign
      - Village gateway sign
      - 40mph sign
  - Numerous accidents along “The Bungalows” (from Furner Farm to The Cot)
    - Relax the criteria of DfT Circular 01/2006 for 40mph
      - Volume of traffic using Oakhurst Corner (Woodchurch junction)
      - Number of accidents, including several fatalities
      - Proximity of houses to road
      - Increased density of houses
      - Business activity
      - Public bridleway and footpaths
      - Sharp bends
      - Bus stop (service and school)

### Section B: 30mph from Big Tree Farm to Beult Cottage

- Currently 40mph.
- Jacobs proposed that this should remain at 40mph as they identified that there are a low number of vulnerable road users.
- Our findings contradict this; hence the working group recommends that this section of road should be **reduced to 30mph**.
  - Traffic survey at Forge Corner identifies a vehicle every 4.8 seconds at peak times.
  - Forms part of the heart of Bethersden village.
    - Residents are actively involved in village activities.
    - They walk to the shops / school etc
    - Significant number of people crossing the A28 at Forge Corner
    - Density of houses is highest here.
    - Numerous accidents.
    - High density of businesses, both residential and commercial.
  - We believe that our findings show that this section of the A28 conforms with the definition of a village per DfT Circular 01/2006, and as such **30mph is the appropriate speed**.

### Section C: 40mph from Beult Cottage to the parish of High Halden

- Currently 60mph.
- We support Jacobs proposal that this should be reduced to 40mph.
  - There have been numerous accidents, including fatalities, in the vicinity of Bull Bridge. This site has been identified as a “crash cluster” by Kent Highway Services.
  - Additional accidents, mainly non-reportable, at Gascoigne Corner (in the parish of High Halden).
  - Significant traffic generated by businesses: 2,000 movements per week just from the garden centre.
  - Kent Highway Services have already proposed that this section be reduced to 40mph, with improved road markings and signage. This has been supported by both Bethersden and High Halden Parish Councils, and was approved by the Joint Transportation Board on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009 to be implemented as soon as possible.