



HAWKHURST PARISH COUNCIL
MAKING OUR VILLAGE SAFE FOR CYCLISTS AND
WALKERS



Adopted July 2020

1. Executive summary

1.1. This paper outlines the main considerations which need to be addressed if Hawkhurst is to be made a safer and more attractive environment for cyclists and walkers. It then goes on to make the following specific recommendations to that end.

Recommendation 1. Suitable, quiet, roads in the village should be designated as “access only” for vehicles, to encourage safe family walking and cycling activities.

Recommendation 2. There should be a major focus on repairing roads to make them cycling friendly.

Recommendation 3. We recommend that:

A pedestrian crossing be installed on the Rye Road opposite Tesco supermarket;

A 20 mph speed limit be imposed on Rye Road outside Hawkhurst CEP School;

The busy A229/A268 junction be fitted with a camera monitor to deter jumping of the lights and technology to improve safety and traffic control.

Recommendation 4. Many of the lanes surrounding the village should be subject to a 30 mph speed limit along their lengths to improve safety for cyclists and walkers. Road signage should also be improved, with signs warning of single track road, unsuitability for HGVs. etc.

Recommendation 5. We recommend that:

The mobile speed enforcement vehicle be regularly deployed on the High Street in both 30mph and 40 mph zones;

The existing 30 mph speed limit be extended to encompass all the entrances to Marlborough House School;

Warning lights be installed outside Marlborough House School.

Recommendation 6. We recommend that:

The start of the 40 mph speed limit on Hastings Road leading out of the village be moved to a point just South of the Fish Farm;

The mobile speed enforcement vehicle be regularly deployed on the four main routes into and out of Hawkhurst.

2. General

2.1. Hawkhurst lies in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The surrounding landscape is noted for its rolling hills, small irregular fields and extensive woodland areas. The long-distance Sussex Border Path crosses the village and the High Weald Trail runs just to the north.

2.2. The village also stands at the nexus of two busy East-West and North-South trunk roads which has caused it to be described as “the crossroads of the Weald”. The A229, a designated HGV route from Hastings to Maidstone; and the A268, the main route to Rye and Camber Sands, meet at a crossroads which dominates the centre of the village.

3. Existing facilities for cycling and walking

3.1. There are many local footpaths and links with the two trails mentioned above. A variety of circular walks have been mapped out and walking along these footpaths is a popular local pastime.

3.2. Cycling is largely confined to a few local venues: in particular, the nearby Bedgebury Forest and Bewl Water. Cyclists can access Bedgebury Forest from Hawkhurst via Park Lane, which is part of the National Cycle Route 18 from Canterbury to Tunbridge Wells which then links up with Route 21 near Eridge. Sustrans¹ describes Route 18 as undulating and a challenge for novice riders. There is no off-road safe cycling route from Hawkhurst to Park Lane.

3.3. Elsewhere within and around the village, cycling is not popular. This principally due to the volume of through traffic on main roads and the endemic lack of respect for speed limits, which make cycling a risky proposition. The hilly terrain to North and South of the village can also act as a deterrent, but East-West routes, which encompass the village centre, shops and schools would be attractive cycling routes were it not for the traffic hazard.

3.4. The recent lockdown resulted in local lanes, byways and footpaths all becoming more popular as the absence of traffic made the area noticeably safer for walkers and cyclists. Although footpaths are not, themselves, encumbered by traffic, walking routes often involve stretches along country lanes between footpaths. These country lanes, which are often subject to no speed restriction other than the national 60 mph limit, can be rendered unsafe by speeding traffic, which discourages cycling and walking, particularly in family groups.

¹ The charity dedicated to making it easier to walk and cycle.

4. Improving access for cyclists and walkers

4.1. The Hawkhurst Neighbourhood Development Plan² contains policies designed to :

- Improve the pedestrian environment by improving the network of footpaths throughout the village (AM2);
- Improve pedestrian access to the countryside around the village (AM3); and
- Create a better environment for cyclists and walkers in and around the village (AM4).

4.2. Off-road provision for family cycling and walking (as distinct, for example, from forest mountain biking tracks for enthusiasts) is currently very limited in the village. There are no large parks with cycling paths, for example, where younger children can learn to cycle in safety. This could be remedied by designating certain suitable routes as “access only” and otherwise restricted to cyclists and pedestrians.

4.3. For example, **Whites Lane** and **Stream Lane** are popular walking routes, providing relatively traffic free passage close to the village. Both roads are largely rural with a few residential properties and are not generally used as through routes for traffic. They are both narrow with passing places. To continue to encourage families to walk and cycle on these roads and the connecting footpaths, both could be made “access only” with verges being allowed to become wildflower areas encouraging wildlife.

4.4. Routes for an off road cycle path or a safe road link to **Bedgebury Forest** and **Cycle route 18** should be investigated to encourage residents to visit the forest and visitors to use the Village businesses.



Fig 1. Potholes and damage to road edges: White's Lane

² Neighbourhood Plan 2016 – 2033 made March 2018, as modified April 2020.

4.5. The safety of cyclists is also put at risk by the current condition of the roads. Potholes are a problem for cars, but a serious hazard for cyclists. Furthermore, the edges of many of the lanes surrounding the village have been damaged by excess heavy traffic, adding to the cycling hazard.

Recommendation 1. We suggest that suitable, quiet, roads in the village be designated as “access only” for vehicles, to encourage safe family walking and cycling activities.

Recommendation 2. We call for a major focus on repairing roads to make them cycling friendly. We will encourage the reporting and inspection of local roads with a view to a “pothole blitz” that will make cycling safer and more enjoyable.

5. The dangers presented by traffic speeding through the village

5.1. The Parish Council used social media to invite residents’ views on using the roads, before, during and after lockdown. Respondents unanimously agreed that speeding drivers and motorcyclists made walking and cycling in Hawkhurst dangerous, even on the pavements in the village. Local lanes are also made dangerous by speeding drivers using them as rat runs, with no regard for walkers, cyclists or horse riders.

5.2. There was a consensus that many of the existing speed limits were too high, especially on lanes used for walking. And there was an overwhelming demand for speed cameras to be installed as lack of enforcement made speed limits ineffective. Hawkhurst Speed Watch has not been active during the lockdown but the data from January to March this year, showed that Hawkhurst roads featured 15 times in the top 50 fastest vehicles recorded by Speed Watch across the south east. Two cars were recorded as travelling at 62 mph in a 40mph zone in the village. There are repeated accidents on village roads, including fatalities in recent years at Gills Green, High Street and Rye Road.

5.3. In 2019, some 33% of vehicles passing Speed Watch sites were exceeding the speed limit by more than 10 mph. Many residents feel that the authorities should be taking firm action against such a widespread disregard for the law.

5.4. Concern about safety at junctions was also raised in relation to the risk of collisions between speeding drivers and cars emerging at the following junctions: Cranbrook Road/ Heartenoak Road; Cranbrook Road/ Gills Green; Cranbrook Road/ Slip Mill Lane; Cranbrook Road/Park Lane; Rye Road/ Conghurst Lane; Conghurst Lane/ Hastings Road and High Street/ Delmonden Lane. The failure to enforce safety measures attached to planning consent on recent developments has also presented hazards at junctions: Cranbrook Road/ Heartenoak Road and Hastings Road/Lillesden House.

6. Recommendations in relation to specific areas

6.1. In the light of the above considerations, we make the following further recommendations in relation to specific areas of the village.

Hawkhurst village centre

6.2. In the historic centre of Hawkhurst most of the pavements are narrower than the recommended two metres, so safe space-sharing with cyclists and walkers is not feasible. The present social distancing requirement often causes walkers to divert onto the road which, in many places, is unsafe. The main roads through the village are narrow and often congested. The lack of safe provision for cyclists deters people from cycling to many of the village's main facilities: shops, surgery, cinema etc., which could otherwise be accessed by bicycle. Hawkhurst Primary School is situated just off the main A268 Rye Road adjacent to a supermarket car park and opposite a sheltered housing complex. The road passing the school is long and straight as it leads out of the village and, though the existing speed limit is 30 mph, drivers commonly increase speed here in anticipation of the approaching 40 mph limit. There is no pedestrian crossing to safeguard the children and elderly people who cross the road at this point. As well as a pedestrian crossing, there should be a 20 mph speed limit outside the school, with the warning lights which are increasingly installed outside schools.

6.3. The busy A229/A268 crossing at the centre of the village is controlled by traffic lights. Long queues of traffic in all directions are commonplace, causing poor air quality, especially in the narrow Cranbrook Road part of the junction. Traffic approaching along Cranbrook Road must navigate a constricted access road to the village only to encounter congestion at the lights. The result is that many drivers jump the lights and speed away on the straight exit roads, endangering public safety.



6.4. We consider that the safety of the crossroads could be improved by using modern systems such as “Puffin Crossings” and automatic traffic control measures.

Fig 2. Cranbrook Road. Looking South towards Hawkhurst crossroads. Showing one of the village's narrow footpaths.

Fig 3. Hawkhurst Crossroads. View to North East from South West.



Fig 4. Hawkhurst Crossroads. View to North West from South East.



Recommendation 3. We recommend that:

A pedestrian crossing be installed on the Rye Road opposite Tesco supermarket;

A 20 mph speed limit be imposed on Rye Road outside Hawkhurst CEP School;

The busy A229/A268 junction be fitted with a camera monitor to deter jumping of the lights and technology to improve safety and traffic control.

Lanes surrounding the village centre

6.5. The congestion at the traffic lights also encourages the use of 'rat runs' along narrow local lanes to avoid the lights. Several routes are used for this purpose including **Slip Mill Lane, Delmondene Lane, Hartenoak Road, Water Lane and Conghurst Lane**. Although these lanes are narrow and winding, extensive stretches are deregulated so that drivers can and do drive at up to 60 mph. During lockdown these routes were reclaimed by walkers, cyclists and horse riders, taking advantage of the links they provide with footpaths and bridleways. **Hartenoak Road, Ockley Road, Queens Road and Winchester Road** are also residential roads which can be congested with parked cars. Residents are concerned about the ever-increasing number of vehicles using these congested roads to avoid the lights. The new housing development currently under construction will put further pressure on this area once completed and HGVs delivering to the site have caused extra congestion and damage to road surfaces and verges.

Fig 5. Slip Mill Lane.

Looking North from Iddenden Green.



6.6. **Water Lane** is a single track lane with passing places. Many footpaths intersect with the lane and it is popular with walkers. However, traffic routinely speeds along it, endangering cyclists and walkers. The speed limit here should be reduced to 30mph, with more warning signs.

Recommendation 4. We recommend that these roads be subject to a 30 mph speed limit along their lengths to improve safety for cyclists and walkers. Road signage to be improved, signs warning single track road, unsuitable for HGVs, etc.

High Street

6.7. Traffic entering Hawkhurst from the junction with the A21 at Flimwell passes along the High Street (A268). Before the Cottage Hospital traffic is subject to the national speed limit. Thereafter the speed limit is 40 mph until the approach to the village centre outside the golf course, where it reduces to 30 mph.

6.8. The road from Flimwell is long and straight, encouraging fast driving. The 40 and 30 mph speed limits are routinely ignored by a substantial proportion of drivers. Data obtained from Speed Watch shows that this road has the worst record for excess speed in the village, with between 40 and 60 vehicles per hour exceeding the 30 mph limit on entering the village and more than 50% of vehicles travelling at more than 50 mph in the 40 mph zone leaving the village.

6.9. A 2013 survey of 38 households in the High Street revealed that 96% were concerned about speeding traffic; 77% were specifically concerned about the danger to cyclists and 87% about the danger to pedestrians. 90% of those interviewed wanted the current 40 mph limit reduced to 30 mph.

6.10. It is clear that, regardless of statutory speed limits, drivers will continue to drive at dangerous speeds on the High Street until they are deterred by enforcement measures. It is noteworthy that the mobile speed unit is regularly stationed further along the same road at Sandhurst. The Parish Council has previously requested that the mobile speed unit be deployed on the A268 (and the A229) at Hawkhurst but this has been rejected on the grounds that there is no suitable site to park the van. We think that this is too negative a view and that, if all options were considered, a site could be found. Failing that, we would argue for a fixed camera located on the approach to the village. **The position is simply this: either we deter traffic from speeding by installing cameras or we deter walkers and cyclists by tolerating speeding traffic.** If we are really serious about encouraging walking and cycling (not to mention enforcing the law), we must reduce the danger posed by speeding traffic.

6.11. The footpath along High Street is narrow and at a lower level than the road so there is no protection for pedestrians should vehicles leave the road. This is a relatively common occurrence, with residents' fences often being damaged. An HGV very recently veered off the road onto the pavement in the 30mph zone



Fig 6. High Street: HGV left the road and careered onto footpath. Note that the

vehicle ended up hard against the fence outside the Catholic church, the driver implausibly claiming³ he was blinded by the sun. Anyone who happened to be using the footpath at the time of this incident would certainly have been killed.

³ The sun was, at that time of day, in his rear quarter!

6.12. Other vehicles have recently left the road at the same point, damaging the fence. A speed indicator has also been demolished and was immediately removed by the County Council without regard to the continuing need for it.

Fig 7. High Street. Westbound traffic approaching 40 mph limit before Marlborough School

6.13. Marlborough House School is a large school on High Street. There are no protective markings outside the school: nothing more than a standard school warning sign in each direction and no pedestrian crossing points. The great majority of pupils travel to and from the school in cars and the road is considered so dangerous that even parents living nearby will not allow their children to walk along the footpath. To enable pupils to walk safely to school, the 30 mph limit should be moved to encompass all the school entrances and warning lights should be installed outside the school for illumination at school times.



Recommendation 5. We recommend that:

The mobile speed enforcement vehicle be regularly deployed on the High Street in both 30mph and 40 mph zones;

The existing 30 mph speed limit be extended to encompass all the entrances to Marlborough House School;

Warning lights be installed outside Marlborough House School.

Highgate Hill

6.14. Highgate Hill connects the two main parts of the village: Highgate in the North and The Moor in the South. It is sufficiently steep in places to deter casual cyclists but provides an attractive walking route. Southbound traffic, having navigated the crossroads in the centre of the village, routinely exceeds the 30 mph limit on this road, endangering both pedestrians (as there are no safe crossing places) and traffic

emerging from the many residential side roads. The situation continues along Horns Road and Hastings Road which many drivers treat as unrestricted.

6.15. In relation to Hastings Road, TWBC has already given permission for the 40 mph sign to be moved further out of the village to a point just beyond the new development of 20 houses at Lillesden Park. Indeed, it was a planning condition that this was paid for by the developer, but this has not been enforced. However, given the speed of the traffic using Hastings Road (evidence from Speed Watch shows that up to 50% of traffic travel at 50 mph in the current 40 mph zone) we consider that the 40 mph sign should be moved further outward to a point just beyond the Fish Farm. This would improve the safety of cyclists on what is currently a dangerous stretch of road, and also make access and egress from the Fish Farm and Hawkhurst Cemetery safer.

6.16. Residents are concerned about the speed limits being so regularly exceeded. The overwhelming view is that this can only be addressed by regularly deploying speed cameras on each of the four main routes into and out of the village: High Street (see above); Cranbrook Road; Rye Road; and the stretch encompassing Highgate Hill, Moor Hill, Hastings Road, and Horns Road.

Recommendation 6. We recommend that:

The start of the 40 mph speed limit on Hastings Road leading out of the village be moved to a point just South of the Fish Farm;

The mobile speed enforcement vehicle be regularly deployed on the four main routes into and out of Hawkhurst.

Hawkhurst Parish Council

13th July 2020

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