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Dear Mrs Senter

A47 MIDDLETON SPEED LIMIT REVIEW

Following the Highways Agency's commitment to carry out a speed limit review in Middleton I write to confirm the outcome of that review.

I thank you for your letter of 4 September 2014 setting out the Middleton Parish Council's view and those of Henry Bellingham MP and various residents and neighbouring parishes supporting that view. I have written separately to Henry Bellingham MP and will also inform the others of the outcome.

I attach the written report produced by AMEY, who are the Highways Agency's Asset Support Contractors for the Area 6 region and who were tasked to carry out the review. The review finds that the existing 40 mph limit should be retained and the area currently at the national speed limit of 60mph should not be amended. I realise this conclusion will be of considerable disappointment to you. However, the views expressed in your letter which I understand and accept as a subjective view, is not reflected in the evidence records which are required to be considered by Circular 01/2013.

In order to provide a comprehensive response I turn now to your letter of 4 September 2014 and discuss the points you raise under the same headings.

a) Introduction of 30 mph speed limit:

Station road does have a larger than usual number of HGV movements. The junction is indicated on a map type advanced direction sign well in advance of the junction. Junction warning signs are also present on both sides of the road when approaching from the west as are School crossing warning signs. Whilst I accept that the vehicles are relatively slow moving, the junction and hazards likely to be present are clearly indicated and drivers should be aware of the possibility of turning manoeuvres and other hazards and drive accordingly. I also accept that a number of near misses may have occurred here, though no injury collision has been recorded involving turning vehicles.

With regard the stopping of buses, it is unfortunate that there is insufficient space within the public highway to provide a bus layby in either direction. One therefore has to rely on the individual drivers of following vehicles to exercise caution when performing overtaking manoeuvres and to do so only when it is safe. The potential for error will be present regardless of the legal speed limit.

The part of Circular 01/2013 you quote here when referring to the presence of the church, appears to me to be referring to the consideration of whether a speed limit lower than the national limit should be applied rather than a limit lower than that which already exists. It is my view that the case for the collective elements that are suggested to constitute a village in Middleton is marginal and that the presence of the church has been recognised as the deciding factor in applying the 40mph which now exists.

b) Extension of the 40 mph limit;

From the detail in the report it is likely that the collision you refer to was that noted as No. 3 and occurred on 12 December 2013. The collision is noted as a nose to tail which involved three vehicles. I am unable to associate the nose to tail collision to the speed limit either as it exists now, or as you request it to be. In good driving practice there is a recommended safe distance between vehicles at any speed in order to allow for changes in direction or speed by braking which, it would seem, was not adhered to by the drivers involved.

Notwithstanding my comments above, what follows is my consideration of the suggested extension to the existing limit.

I am afraid here that we fall into a very difficult area in that the length of the A47 which includes the houses to the west of the village is too short to justify a speed restriction on its own. I therefore understand your suggestion of extending the existing limit to include these houses. However, since there is a reasonable distance between these houses and the village centre in which very few features are present, should a reduced limit be applied for reasons which the driver may not find obvious, it is likely that drivers will speed up and produce a level of non-compliance within the village centre. It is my view that an extension of the existing limit would produce higher speeds which is the opposite of the parish aspirations.

c) Introduction of a 50 mph Speed Limit Approaching Hill Road Junction:

I accept that you feel the junction of Hill Road has the potential for collision. It has, in the relatively recent past, been the subject of additional measures to enhance its appearance to the approaching driver and now has coloured areas in the carriageway together with map type advance direction signing in both directions well in advance of the junction.

You will note in the report that injury collision records were drawn from a five year period from 1 January 2009 (usually the use of the most recent rolling three year period is used). The only injury collision recorded here was in 2010 and involved vehicles turning right out of Hill road into the path of east bound traffic and not west bound which you suggest is the most onerous approach to the junction. The geometry of the junction

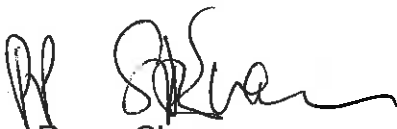
may not be to current design standards and the same could be said for significant lengths of the A47. You will know that whilst design standards change over time, they are not applied to the network retrospectively. In the current layout of the junction the area has a good safety record which does not justify the application of a reduced speed limit.

Finally, I hope that you feel that I have given your request the fullest consideration. The data in the survey undertaken provides an indication that the existing speed limit shows reasonable compliance with the legal limits now applied and that whilst injury collisions have occurred, only one has excess speed as a causing factor. We have discussed the issue of the potential for injury collisions in the past and you will recall that I have explained that one cannot demonstrate savings for injury collisions that have not yet happened when assessing value for money.

I am sympathetic and understanding of the issues you raise. However, it must be understood that a legal limit must reflect the character of the network it applies to, particularly in rural areas, and be recognised by drivers as necessary and appropriate in order that a reasonable level of compliance can be expected. Having carried out the review, examined the evidence we have and discussed the matters you raise, I am convinced that the existing limit and its length is appropriate in Middleton.

As always, we continue to monitor the safety aspects of the whole of the Strategic Road Network and action investigations and network amendments as necessary based on records available. Please consider the above and make contact should you require further discussion.

Yours sincerely



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