

Gawsworth Parish Council

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HIGHWAY SAFETY

Working Document to aid and direct our cooperation and support for Cheshire East in delivering optimal safety improvements for the A536 in Gawsworth and for intersecting roads.

FINAL VERSION: MARCH 2019

Introduction

There is widespread, continuing community concern about road and pedestrian safety with respect to the A536 as it passes through Gawsworth and roads such as Dark Lane which intersect with the A536. Highways safety is the responsibility of Cheshire East Council but Gawsworth Parish Council considers that it has a responsibility to represent residents and to liaise with Cheshire East Council, the police and others with the aim of aiding such improvements as are possible to reduce the risk to road users and pedestrians in Gawsworth. The Parish Council can help by contributing our local knowledge and views to the safety improvement plan and to specific projects. We can propose, with the support of the Ward Councillor, minor projects for funding through Area Highways Group funds and some, limited cost complimentary measures might be funded by the Parish Council. We can also promote openness and information sharing, help prioritise and coordinate different options and lobby for safety measures to be undertaken in good time and in line with service commitments.

This paper is based on information available to Gawsworth Parish Council. We hope it will act as a basis for productive interactions between Gawsworth Parish Council, Cheshire East Council and adjoining Parish and Town Councils to bring about road safety improvements with respect to the A536 through Gawsworth and adjoining roads, and that these will be undertaken with all reasonable speed. We plan to update it at regular intervals when needed.

Background and situation analysis

The concern over safety on the A536 and intersecting roads is long-standing. Some changes have been made over the years such as reducing the speed limit in a section through the village area to 40 mph, additional signage and engineering works. Yet continuing fatal and serious accidents, minor accidents and local knowledge all clearly indicate that more needs to be done and indeed can be done. The A536 as it passes through Gawsworth and Eaton has been identified as one of the 50 most dangerous stretches of A roads in the country. Cheshire East Council, in their recent bid for 'Safer Roads Funding', set out specific safety measures they would undertake with the £2.31m government grant announced in June 2018. David Rutley MP has expressed his concern about safety on the A536 stating in a letter

to a resident “I have strong concerns about the current lack of speed enforcement on the A536 and particularly in the vicinity of the Gawsworth crossroads. I believe that Cheshire East Council needs to be more fully committed to introducing traffic safety measures and to combatting speeding in the area.”¹

Expert analyses and learning from incidents, particularly as supplied by the police, should drive the investment in road safety improvement measures. It is important to identify clearly the improvements that are desirable, how they can work with each other, how they can minimise both the chance and serious effects of driver errors.

Councillor Briggs has attended an Area Highway Group Meeting where funding for minor highways projects is determined and we hope to continue our participation. The action plan below will identify specific projects that we hope may be funded through this channel. Reports of specific concerns such as those about damaged safety signage or severely faded road markings seem not to be followed up with appropriate urgency and according to timescales set out in council policies for urgent repairs.

Planned Safety Improvements.

The Cheshire East bid for Safer Roads funding is available on their website and it sets out how they propose to spend the £2.31m ‘safer roads’ government grant they will receive in 2020 - 2021. They undertook a detailed analysis based on the information they hold and proposed specifically:

- Upgrading the existing carriageway to improve grip for vehicles
- Signalising Dark Lane/Church Lane/A536 crossroads in Gawsworth and relocation of flag signing
- A speed limit review over the whole designated section of the A536 including Gawsworth
- Installation of average speed cameras
- Upgrading the carriageway markings and road studs
- Upgrading the signing at various locations along the route.

Cheshire East asserted that signal installation at the Dark Lane/Church Lane junction will alleviate problems at that location and that various other improvements will lead to ‘improved decision making and improved hazard perception’ and that the measures proposed will reduce or remove the potential associated with driver errors such as wrong decisions on approach speeds to the Gawsworth crossroads. Driver error is often quoted as a reason for accidents on this stretch of road and it is encouraging that funding will be available in 2020 / 2021 for measures which can reduce this.

In its planning application 18/5544M Cheshire East Council’s development company Engine of the North proposed a puffin crossing a few metres north of the Dark Lane / A536 cross roads. No mention of the ‘safer roads’ plans for installing signals at the cross roads was made. The puffin crossing and the crossroads signals are fairly clearly not compatible with each other and requests for an explanation have so far received no response from Cheshire East.

In the bid for the Safer Roads funding the Cheshire East Council Leader set out her total support for the application and the council confirmed that they have the capability and resources to implement the improvements when the funding becomes available in 2020/2021. It is of concern therefore that a Cheshire East spokesperson explained in a recent Congleton Chronicle article that the council had made no announcements about the grant ‘because there was nothing to announce’ and also implied that the project might not go ahead because ‘a lot can happen’ (between 2019 and 2020). Indeed

¹ Letter from David Rutley MP to Linda Miller dated 11th February 2019

Brexit could lead to withdrawal of the government funds but if they are provided we understand that they must be ringfenced for the stated project.

Gawsworth Parish Council was not consulted by Cheshire East about the ‘Safer Roads’ Government grant but will continue its efforts to establish a meaningful dialogue with Cheshire East Council to ensure that the grant brings about the identified safety benefits at the earliest opportunity.

Accident history and situation overview

Between October 2012 and May 2017 there were 64 personal injury accidents on a 12km stretch of the A536 between Congleton and Macclesfield, including 3 fatalities. More recently a double fatality occurred in October 2018 on the A536 as it passes through Gawsworth. Other accidents could very easily have resulted in further fatalities. Gawsworth Parish Council has set up an accident log so that accidents that are not recorded in the Cheshire East database but are notified to us can be logged. There is a clear and obvious need to learn from accidents and determine what changes could reduce the risk of similar accidents and we believe this was done by Cheshire East Council in putting together their ‘Safer Roads’ grant bid.

The police play an extremely useful role in feeding back learning and suggested safety enhancements to Cheshire East Council. Gawsworth Parish Council has met with Robin Johnson, the police highways safety officer to benefit from his knowledge and seek his advice on how we can be most helpful to highways safety.

It is not made clear to the public or the Parish Council how police recommendations following accidents are processed and prioritised and eventually included in safety action plans. However, it has to be recognised that the lack of transparency in this area may be driven by valid concerns over liability claims with respect to the initial incident and any future incidents that may occur before recommendations are acted upon.

The dangers on the A536 in Gawsworth are set to increase over the next few years. Traffic volume will increase massively as a result of Local Plan identified developments providing thousands of houses and many new businesses both to the north of Congleton and in the South Macclesfield development. Around 300 houses and additional business space will be provided in the Parish of Gawsworth adjacent to the A536. Also, the link roads to the north of Congleton and south of Macclesfield will feed traffic onto the A536 through Gawsworth. Developments in the Broken Cross and Henbury areas will feed significant additional traffic through Gawsworth Road and Dark Lane. These are narrow and hazardous country lanes emerging at the Dark Lane/A536 crossroads.

Action plan to improve safety on the A536 through Gawsworth.

We hope this working document will be a useful contribution to improvements in safety on the A536 in Gawsworth being implemented with all possible speed.

| Safety Improvement Actions | Current issues | Parish Council Actions |
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| A. Emergency Repairs. All emergency, urgent repairs should be dealt with urgently in line with Cheshire East service standards. Maintenance | Urgent repairs can take months to action and items which appear to be in the urgent category can be allocated to future works | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Parish Council would welcome a mechanism whereby they can feed into the highways inspection system by identifying |

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| <p>should be in line with CEC's responsibilities under the Road Traffic Act and CEC policy.</p> | <p>listings with no target completion date. Specific outstanding issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dangerous Bend sign first damaged, now missing northbound on A536 approaching Lowes lane. Reported mid 2018 • Damaged or obscured speed and other signs approaching Dark Lane crossroads | <p>urgent, high risk faults which can then be given priority allocation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Parish Council would welcome access to reports on performance against service levels on highways repairs • The Parish Council will continue to report highways faults and to follow up on their resolution. |
| <p>B. Review Speed Limits. Exceeding current speed limits continues to be a problem on the A536 and Dark Lane. The appropriate speed limit for the A536 in Gawsworth and beyond will be reassessed under the 'Safer Roads' grant.</p> | <p>The 'Safer Roads' grant will provide funding for a reanalysis of the appropriate speed limits along the whole stretch of the A536. It is rumoured however that a speed review has recently been undertaken. In the interim the PCSO undertakes periodic speed camera sessions.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gawsworth residents have been asked to volunteer for community speed watch training. This may be a deterrent to speeding up to installation of average speed cameras in 2020 - 2021. • The PCSO will be asked to allocate as much time as possible to her speed camera activities on the A536. The Parish Council will continue to publicise these activities. • The Parish Council will support the reanalysis of speed limits on the A536 |
| <p>C. Average Speed Cameras</p> | <p>The Safer Roads grant provides funding for installation of average speed cameras along the Macclesfield – Congleton A536. The funding will be provided in 2020-2021.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Parish Council will support the earliest possible introduction of average speed cameras. |
| <p>D. SIDs. Install Speed Indicator Devices. There is currently one vehicle triggered junction warning device operational on the stretch of the A536</p> | <p>A vehicle triggered junction warning device for Northbound traffic approaching the Dark Lane crossroads could be helpful. Additional warning signs</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will request that installing additional SIDs, junction warning devices and other signage be considered as part of the |

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| <p>southbound ahead of the Church Lane cross roads.</p> | <p>approaching the Maggoty Lane crossroads could be considered. We understand that there is currently a hiatus by CEC in installing new SIDs with no timetable for resolution pending a revised local policy being written following changed national guidelines. How SIDs can complement the promised average speed cameras is uncertain.</p> | <p>finalisation of plans for implementation of measures funded by the safer roads grant.</p> |
| <p>E. Extend no-overtaking zones. The no-overtaking double white lines currently extend only a short distance from both the Dark Lane and Maggoty Lane crossroads. This permits overtaking in an area which is clearly potentially dangerous and where there have been previous crashes. The current double white line zones seem clearly and obviously inadequate</p> | <p>Regulations lay down formulae for the length of double white lines but the regulations stress that discretion is possible and that a site visit is important. The no-overtaking double white lines should be extended to approximately 150m N of the Church Lane crossroads for south bound traffic. Also extend the no-overtaking zone to 100m North and South of the Maggoty Lane cross roads. This would be a simple, low cost action which should improve safety but have no effect on traffic flow.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Urgent. Gawsworth PC will seek the support of our ward councillor for this to be actioned through the CEC highways small projects fund as soon as possible. It may be necessary to request an on-site reassessment which Gawsworth PC would be pleased to contribute to. |
| <p>F. Traffic Lights. CEC have planned traffic lights at the Church Lane crossroads and funding will be provided in 2020 - 2021 as part of the safer roads grant.</p> | <p>Emerging onto, or crossing, the A536 at the Church Lane junction is very precarious with frequent near misses and a number of accidents.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gawsworth PC will support in principle the installation of traffic lights with integral pedestrian crossing at the A536 / Dark Lane crossroads, subject to viewing the detailed plans. The optimal design for the signalisation of the cross roads should be determined in consultation with Gawsworth PC |
| <p>G. Pedestrian crossing. Install a signalled pedestrian crossing in the region of the Church Lane crossroads.</p> | <p>The £2.3m government Safer Roads grant covers signalisation of the Church Lane cross roads and it seems obvious to include a</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gawsworth PC to continue to press CEC to rationalise their two conflicting proposals for a pedestrian |

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| | <p>pedestrian crossing in this safety improvement.</p> <p>The Puffin crossing proposed by CEC on condition that the Dark Lane Rural Exception housing development goes ahead will not be needed and in any case previous CE advice did not favour a Puffin crossing. A puffin crossing a few metres away from a signalled crossing seems non-sensical.</p> | <p>crossing at the Dark Lane crossroads.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject to reviewing detailed plans, it seems that incorporating a pedestrian crossing into the signalisation of the Dark Lane crossroads is the optimal solution which Gawsorth PC can support. |
| <p>H. Replace existing warning signs with improved high visibility signage. Manage overgrowth of planting which obscures current signs.</p> | <p>Several exiting warning signs are poorly visible or missing. New high visibility warning signs should be installed and placing should avoid the current problem of being obscured by overgrown hedging for much of the year.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved signage forms part of the £2.3m government safer roads grant. • Gawsorth PC will continue to report damaged, obscured and missing signs to CEC (See also A above) |
| <p>I. Traffic Calming measures. The work up by Cheshire East Council for the successful safer roads grant bid identified a range of measures to improve safety on the A536</p> | <p>CEC highways should identify all traffic calming options and identify which are desirable for the A536 as it passes through Gawsorth. This should be undertaken as part of the £2.3m grant spending.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gawsorth PC will be pleased to contribute local knowledge to ensure that the grant money is spent optimally. |
| <p>J. Report on future traffic volumes and effects on safety of A526 and Dark Lane through Gawsorth. Significant increases in traffic volume will result from thousands of new homes and new businesses relying on the A536, Dark Lane and other Gawsorth Roads.</p> | <p>CEC should provide GPC with traffic evaluations already undertaken in connection with the South Macclesfield, west Macclesfield and North Congleton developments. Further expert evaluation should be undertaken with specific reference to traffic volume and type likely to affect Gawsorth over the next 5-10 years and how this might affect Highways Safety. CEC should share their suggested solutions. Dark Lane is already below acceptable standards with two cars unable to pass side by side at several points. A planning application in</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gawsorth Parish Council to support Cheshire East's assessments with local knowledge. • Gawsorth PC to support Cheshire East in finding and implementing solutions to deal with the substantially increased risks over coming years. • Gawsorth PC to press CEC to produce an assessment of traffic and pedestrian safety in Dark Lane. This should not involve further decreasing the |

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| | <p>connection with developing farmland off Dark Lane includes proposals to further decrease the carriageway width and increase risk. Also placing of stones on the verge (owned by highways) presents a hazard.</p> | <p>width of the below standard lane</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GPC will maintain its objections to the planned development on Dark Lane on the grounds that highways safety will be further reduced by narrowing of the Dark Lane carriageway. • GPC will support CEC in enforcement action to get hazardous stones removed from the verge on Dark Lane. |
| <p>K. Pot Holes. The lanes in Gawsworth suffer from pot holes like elsewhere. They can be particularly hazardous down windy country lanes as they can force sudden avoidance swerving into oncoming traffic or pedestrians.</p> | <p>Cheshire East is reviewing its policy as currently potholes must be deeper than in most parts of the country before they are filled. As a large, mainly rural borough they have particular challenges with potholes and claims for damage which represent a drain on resources.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GPC will continue to report potholes as we become aware of them. We will highlight highways damage when it represents a particular danger e.g. when on a blind bend. |
| <p>L. Road Surface. Eroded and substandard road surfaces can be a particular hazard on the A536</p> | <p>The safer roads grant provides for upgrades to the carriageway surface to improve grip</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GPC will support upgrades to the carriageway surface in consultations with CE • CE will contribute local knowledge to identify where particular troublesome areas might be. |