

## Gawsworth Parish Council

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## A536 SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

### BACKGROUND

Gawsworth Parish Council has submitted information and representations to Cheshire East Council concerning safety improvements on the A536 as it passes through Gawsworth, both before and after the award of a Department of Transport £2.31m safer roads grant. The council has based its representations on local knowledge and data and has also discussed the challenges with police road safety and other police officers. The parish council secured a meeting with highways officers on 12<sup>th</sup> October which has left it extremely concerned that Cheshire East Council intends to renege on the commitment to undertake all of the safer roads funded work. The parish council has not yet received a copy of the speed limit review or written details of the current proposals and requests that these are provided without delay.

However, it appears that the CEH (Cheshire East Highways) proposal is based on incomplete data and knowledge, that the informed input which the parish council can provide has so far been largely ignored, and that government guidance, and indeed common sense, relating to speed limit reviews, road design and other matters has not been fully exercised. The council demands that its input is assessed fully, and feedback provided before any approach is made to the Department of Transport to deviate from the originally proposed and funded works.

In preparing these comments the council notes that DfT Guidance sets out, inter alia:

1. Road safety improvements and Speed Limit Assessments must be evidence based.
2. Solutions should take on board the views of the community that are served.
3. Local residents may express their concerns or desire for a lower speed limit and these comments should be considered.
4. The Highway Authority is given flexibility in setting local speed limits to take account of local road conditions, local needs and the surrounding environment
5. Roads should be designed so that mistakes made by road users do not result in death or serious injury.
6. Speed management and road design involve many components designed to work together. Speed limits should not be set in isolation, but as part of a package with other measures to manage vehicle speeds and improve road safety.
7. Speed limits should reflect the needs of all road users, not just motorised vehicles
8. Ensuring improved quality of life for local communities is important with a balance between road safety, accessibility and environmental objectives, especially in rural communities
9. Key factors that should be taken into account in any decisions include history of all types of crashes, their severity, causes and frequency, road geometry and engineering, road function, composition of road users (including existing and

potential levels of vulnerable road users such as people walking, cycling, riding horses and on motorbikes), existing traffic speed, road environment etc.

CEC was invited to apply for a safer roads grant from DFT to carry out safety work on the A536 passing through Gawsworth. Their successful application for £2.31m included the stated aims of improving road safety for all motorised and non-motorised users on the route, reducing issues of speeding and loss of control incidents. A 'speed limit review' was to be undertaken which would consider speed limits in the context of the environment, local knowledge and the proposed changes to road design, signage etc and which would inform the whole programme.

Specific safety improvements for Gawsworth for which the grant was given would include signalising the A536 crossroads with Dark Lane / Church Lane. It was stated this would alleviate the right turn and junction overshoot problem and together with improved route guidance and visual cues, carriageway marking and signing leading should lead to improved decision making and hazard perception. Currently, exiting Church Lane and turning right onto the A536 is essentially a matter of accelerating and hope for the best, even if cars approaching on the A536 from the south are travelling within the current 40mph limit. The right turn is particularly hazardous for cyclists and others who cannot accelerate quickly onto the main road. Signals would provide clarity over vehicle movement and remove the need for decisions over approach speeds. Signalisation incorporating a pedestrian crossing would also provide safety for vulnerable users at an extremely hazardous junction and would reflect DFT guidance. We assumed that the signalisation described in the grant bid included a pedestrian crossing but were informed at the meeting this was not the case. This seems nonsensical. The need for safe pedestrian crossing at this site was previously acknowledged by CEC in offering to provide a pedestrian crossing linked to their subsequently rejected planning application to develop a building site a short way down Dark Lane.

The reason given at the meeting with CEH for not progressing with signalisation at the crossroads was that there had not been any deaths nor serious injury accidents during the past 3 years on the whole route. With the decreased traffic due to the pandemic in recent years this is clearly an invalid premise. This is further compounded by the failure to consider local knowledge and data on all collisions, aspects that were cited in the original grant application. A variety of other reasons as to why the signalisation might not go ahead had been given in previous informal responses to parish council enquiries through the ward councillor.

## REQUESTS

The Parish Council requests:

1. **Speed Limit Review:** We request a copy of this without further delay. We note the absence of the speed limit review was only apparent when Gawsworth Parish Council submitted a Freedom of Information request after previous enquiries went unanswered.
  - a. Please explain how the speed limit review takes into account the relationship with other factors such as existing and changed road design e.g. did it assume that signalisation at the Dark Lane crossroads would or would not be in place?

- b. Please confirm whether the government Speed Assessment Tool was used and provide the data and considerations that were included in formulating the recommendations and finalising the Speed Limit Review.
- c. Please explain whether a call for evidence was undertaken and how Impacts on Pedestrians, Cyclists and Others were determined.
- d. We seek reassurance that the late speed limit review was not constructed as a retrofit exercise given that recommending different zones and speed limits would be inconvenient and expensive as much of the infrastructure work, including updated signage and road speed limit markings, which the speed review should inform was done before the speed limit review was undertaken. We have an additional concern that, having identified that a speed limit assessment was necessary, the Traffic Regulation Orders which rely on those orders may be subject to legal challenge.

**2. The current Highways Department proposals for the Dark Lane Crossroads and approaches.**

- a. We request sight of any proposed changes to the safer roads work specifications in Gawsorth together with the evidenced justifications for those changes. We request that we receive these before they are discussed with the Department of Transport to enable us to input comments and local knowledge. We require that the information, views and data below is given full consideration before any decisions are taken on changes to the A536 work and that we are given feedback on each of these points.

**3. Consultation.**

Please provide an explanation of how the Safer Roads grant bid commitment (section B5.1) to informally pre consult with residents has been undertaken and your intentions for future consultations with the affected communities. Residents of Gawsorth Parish along the stretch of the road would have significant interest in being consulted with through the process.

**4. Relationship between elements of the safer Roads grant work.**

We request a full explanation of the relationship between the different elements of speed limits, road design, signage etc combine to improve safety as set out in the objectives of the safer roads bid. We believe, based on local experience and knowledge, that the objectives around safety improvement at the Dark Lane crossroads cannot be met unless signage, line marking and other measures are combined with either speed limit reduction or signalisation or both. Safe pedestrian and cycles crossing is an essential element. If CEC disagrees with our conclusions we request an evidence based analysis that supports an alternative view.

## **EVIDENCE AND VIEWS TO BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION**

1. The suggestion that somehow the risk of serious and fatal accidents has recently reduced at the Dark Lane junction with the A536, or elsewhere on the A536 in

Gawsworth, is wrong and appears to have been made without credible evidence. The apparent premise for not undertaking the funded safety improvements is false. The lack of serious injury and death crashes is obviously likely to be largely due to reduced traffic volumes during pandemic lockdowns. Our knowledge and evidence shows that serious, potentially fatal, crashes (see data below) and many, many near misses continue at the junction.

2. The risk along the A536 and at the crossroads will continue to increase as traffic volumes increase with major housing and commercial developments north and south of Gawsworth. The Dark Lane crossroads are already busy at peak times with long queues leading to impatience and increased collision risk. The A536 between Macclesfield and Congleton and also the Dark Lane crossroads will become progressively busier in coming years. Similarly, from the Dark Lane direction, the Henbury developments and through traffic finding ways to bypass Macclesfield will make the Dark Lane approach even busier unless and until a complete southern relief road is built.
3. As advised by DfT multiple factors must be considered when road safety improvements are considered. Of particular relevance for the Dark Lane junction is that the Speed Limit at the junction must be considered together with signalisation. We note that signage, road surface, white lining etc are important at the junction and that current illuminated warning signs are practically useless. However, knowing this junction well we are of the firm view that if signals are not installed then a maximum speed limit of 30mph is essential to give a reasonable chance of any degree of reasonable safety for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians at the junction.
4. The safer roads grant application stated that the Dark Lane crossroads had 7 accidents in the previous 5 years, therefore required safety improvements. The speed limit review, undertaken with data from 2019, indicated that the average speed of vehicles through Gawsworth was slightly lower than the current 40mph speed limit. Taking the accident data and the speed limit review combined it is our belief that the if vehicles are on average travelling at less than 40mph but still resulted in excessive accident rates at the junction it is a clear indicator that the current speed limit is inappropriate and will not be able to ensure the ongoing safety of all road users and pedestrians.
5. The Dark Lane crossroads forms part of the popular Cheshire cycleway. It is an extremely risky crossing particularly from Church Lane northwest into Dark Lane where cars travelling north on the A536 are hidden from view when cyclists start to cross but, even travelling at the current speed limit of 40 mph, are likely to meet cyclists part way across the carriageway. It is effectively too dangerous for children to cycle to Gawsworth Primary school or for older children to cycle to Macclesfield as the A536 must be crossed and travelled along. The crossroads must be made safer and this could only be done by reducing the speed limit here to 30mph and / or installing signals. Signage and white line changes alone have not worked in the past and there's no reason to believe it could work in the future.
6. There is a northbound bus stop near to the Dark Lane crossroads. However, pedestrians crossing at this point is so dangerous that only the most able bodied and swift of foot are safe to do so. Children using the bus to get to secondary school in Macclesfield is ruled out by many Gawsworth parents as too dangerous resulting in increased car journeys. There is a Methodist Church adjacent to the crossroads with

the pedestrian access leading straight on to the A536. Many attendees are far from nimble enough to cross at this point. Wheelchair access from the Village is not possible. The bus stop is inaccessible to wheelchair users and buggies or prams. Not only is the speed of northbound traffic a problem but there is no dropped kerb. It is essential that the crossroads are made safe for pedestrians of all ages and abilities.

7. DfT advise that all crash data should be considered and this is important with respect to the stretch of the A536 through Gawsworth. Serious accidents, scrapes and numerous near misses continue to happen. In recent months a car ended up through a hedge and in a field north of the crossroads, a motorcyclist was knocked off and broke his leg, a small van pulled out on a car and luckily for both passengers did not result in injury and a few weeks ago south of the crossroads a serious 3 car accident resulted in the road being closed for several hours. Incidentally, the police officer directing the traffic at the blocked road commented on observing a number of near misses caused by confusion at the crossroads junction and undertook to feed this back. The Parish Council keeps records of accidents if we are made aware of them by residents. Our records are summarised below but it should be understood that this will still miss some serious and potentially serious accidents and near misses which were not notified to us. The best source of reliable information is from the experiences people of Gawsworth who use the A536 and the crossroads daily, of the RTC's in 2022 one was witnessed by and another one had the injured party attended to by one of our parish councillors who lives on the junction. Local residents know the crossroads continue to be dangerous and demand that Cheshire East Council do not renege on spending the Safer Roads Fund to achieve this.

29/09/2022	Three vehicles. Appeared car crossed double white lines and head on collision narrowly avoided.
12/04/2022	Three vehicles. Police attended. Vehicles undrivable.
07/01/2022	Motorbike, open fracture to one leg.
08/11/2021	One vehicle by bus stop. Police attended.
10/2021	Vehicle ended up in hedge opposite Forge Close.
29/04/2019	Vehicle collided with litterbin adjacent to Warren Barn

8. Local residents are also aware of a significant volume of near misses that occur at the crossroads, many indicated to residents by the disturbance of loud sounding of horns by drivers. Near misses within the past 18 months include a HGV travelling north inches away from hitting a car who pulled out from Dark Lane, the HGV driver spoke to a Gawsworth resident stating he could have killed the other driver had he being travelling only slightly faster, he was so shaken and upset that he parked his vehicle so he could calm down before he continued.
9. The no-overtaking double white lines should be extended to the north of the Church Lane crossroads for south bound traffic. Also extend the no-overtaking zone to North and South of the Maggoty Lane crossroads. The most recent accident in this area involved 3 cars, one of which was apparently overtaking legally and a full head on collision was narrowly avoided. The road was closed for several hours but luckily no one was seriously hurt. We believe extended double white lines would significantly reduce the likelihood of serious accidents on this stretch of the A536 and would be consistent with government guidelines on white lines and the Councils flexibility within.

10. A southbound bus stop is situated on the A536 just south of the junction with Lowes Lane and a right-hand bend on the main road. Pedestrians wait on a narrow piece of pavement with no escape to a verge and in direct line of southbound traffic travelling south at the national speed limit. There is a bend warning sign and chevrons but it does seem like only a matter of time until misjudging the corner, or adverse weather conditions will cause a vehicle to plough into people waiting for the bus. This should be considered when judging whether the national speed limit is appropriate at this point and what signage might help prevent what would be almost certain death.
  
11. In finalising the road design features active travel should be considered. Currently the A536 through Gawsworth is a barrier to active travel. As described above the dangerous crossroads with no crossing effectively prevents pedestrians from the village, and particularly the less nimble and wheelchair and buggy users, visiting the Methodist chapel or using the bus into Macclesfield or Congleton. Cyclists are also at risk crossing here on the Cheshire cycle way. There is a footpath along the length of the A536 through Gawsworth but sections are overgrown and impassable. Other sections are right on the roadside and overgrown hedges routinely push pedestrians into the main road and make it impassable to buggies and wheelchairs. The two main settlements areas of Gawsworth Parish are separated from each other for active travellers as there is no reasonably safe north-south route along or parallel to the A536. The Parish Council have made submissions to the Macclesfield and Congleton Transport Delivery draft plans suggesting cycleways and walkways along the A536 similar to those proposed for the A537 west of Macclesfield. In the meantime we request that the current works relating to speed limits and road layout are designed so that pedestrians, cyclists and disabled users are also considered, as is advised in government guidance.