

Derbyshire County Council

Cabinet Meeting

14 November 2006

Report of the Strategic Director – Environmental Services

Setting Local Speed Limits (Sustainable Communities)

(1) **Purpose of Report** To advise Cabinet of new guidance from Government on the setting of local speed limits and to agree the principles to be followed in carrying out a review and in authorising any resulting changes in limits.

(2) **Information and Analysis** During August 2006, Government released new guidance entitled “Setting Local Speed Limits” Department for Transport ([DfT] Circular 01/2006). It has a number of stated objectives, including a greater consistency of speed limits across the country and a better balance between road safety, accessibility and environmental objectives. Traffic authorities are asked to carry out a review of limits on all of their A and B roads and to implement any changes by 2011. In order to assist this process and to work towards the objective of national consistency, a framework is provided which sets out the recommended speed limits for different types of road.

In urban areas, 30 miles per hour (mph) is expected to remain the standard limit, but in town centres, residential areas or near schools, a 20 mph limit could be considered. Elsewhere, on higher quality roads with few vulnerable users, it may be appropriate to retain or introduce 40 mph or 50 mph limits.

In rural areas, the retention of the current 60 mph limit is recommended for high quality “strategic” A and B roads with few bends, junctions or accesses and a relatively good injury accident record. Elsewhere, though, where there are higher numbers of bends, accesses or junctions 50 mph or 40 mph limits will be considered more appropriate. Another key recommendation is that 30 mph should be the norm through villages.

Given the nature of Derbyshire’s network of A and B roads it is expected that quite significant changes will be required in order to comply with the guidance. In the short term there is no doubt that public expectations will be raised over the implications of this, and it will be important that the Authority clearly sets out its priorities for the review, discussed further below.

The guidance also covers criteria to be considered when carrying out physical traffic calming and introducing Home Zones and Quiet Lanes, where all road space is available to be “shared” by different user groups. These are only viewed as appropriate under very low traffic flows, and it is anticipated that their applicability within Derbyshire will remain limited.

In order to comply with the guidance it will be necessary for this Authority to review its existing speed limits and to identify where, if anywhere, these differ from those proposed. This exercise can involve the consideration of accident records and of existing vehicle speeds. It will then be necessary to establish whether changes to limits should be introduced or whether there are justifiable local circumstances behind retaining the current limit. Reasons for such decisions will, though, need to be clear and strong, and there is no doubt that the guidance will result in numerous changes. The scale of the task is illustrated by the length of road to be addressed, the Authority is responsible for almost 1,000 kilometres of A and B roads.

In reviewing speed limits there are, as noted by the guidance itself, considerations other than road safety. The limits set for different roads will clearly be an influence on which are chosen by drivers and, therefore, they have the potential to be used to encourage the use of the most suitable routes. In accordance with the general principles adopted in the Derbyshire and Derby Joint Local Transport Plan (LTPs) it is intended that where a choice of limits exists for any road, this is determined primarily by road safety considerations. It is intended that priority be given to making any necessary changes on rural roads with identified poor accident records. This is because, over the period 1999 to 2004 (the latest five year data included in the annual Casualty Report), 59% of fatal and serious casualties occurred in rural areas. The number of these rural casualties remained almost unchanged over the period, in contrast to encouraging reductions in urban areas. Cabinet is requested to endorse these general principles for the review of limits.

Government guidance requires only that A and B roads are reviewed, with all required change introduced by 2011. These changes will require the publication of Traffic Regulation Orders and consideration of objections. This can be a lengthy process. Also, if this were to result in an overall increase in travel time on any or all of these roads, there would be potential to inadvertently increase traffic on less suitable (C or unclassified) roads. The review will, therefore, need to identify whether this outcome is a risk and, where appropriate, be extended onto other roads to ensure that any changes in limits reinforce rather than undermine the roads hierarchy.

At this stage preliminary work has already been undertaken to identify a priority list of routes where changes to speed limits (in accordance with the new guidelines) is considered appropriate. This assessment has shown that the overall implications for financial and staff resources will be significant. It is recommended that Cabinet authorises the Cabinet Member for Sustainable

Communities to assess the priority list to be included in the review to ensure that this is concentrated on roads with the greatest road safety concerns.

As well as the signing required to advise highway users of any changes, consideration will need to be given to the need for appropriate engineering measures to help ensure that limits are self enforcing and that benefits to casualty reduction are maximised.

It will also be necessary to put in place an effective system to monitor the effects of changes in limits on vehicle speeds, which will be a follow on from the extensive initial data collection exercise required as part of the review.

A further report will be brought to Cabinet should the outcome of these be significant enough to bring about a material change to the strategy or spending profile as outlined in the LTP.

(3) **Financial Considerations** From preliminary assessments it is estimated that the cost of the speed limit revision on the A and B classified road network will be in the region of £900k. This excludes any associated traffic calming/route enhancement works to highlight the lower speed limits. This element of work is difficult to estimate but is likely to be several million pounds over the four year period. This whole programme could be funded from the Local Transport Plan capital allocation. Considerable staff time will be required to carry out the review. Full implications of this are also difficult to estimate.

(4) **Legal and Human Rights Considerations** Any changes in speed limits will need to be the subject of legal orders in due course. These require advertisement, are subject to objections and are considered by the meeting of the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Communities.

(5) **Health Considerations** As detailed in the body of the report, road safety is the key consideration in the setting of speed limits.

(6) **Property Considerations** There are no property considerations associated with this report.

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: prevention of crime and disorder, equality of opportunity; and environmental and personnel considerations.

(7) **Background Papers** The full text of Government guidance on "Setting Local Speed Limits" can be found at www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_rdsafety/documents/page/dft_rdsafety_612_262.pdf or can be obtained from the Environmental Services Department. Copies will be available at the Cabinet meeting.

- (8) **Key Decision** Yes.
- (9) **Officer Recommendations** That Cabinet:-
- 9.1 Agrees to follow the guidance on “Setting Local Speed Limits” in reviewing Derbyshire’s speed limits and that the review should give priority to road safety considerations, with initial work concentrating on rural roads with identified poor accident records.
- 9.2 Authorises the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Communities to approve the detailed programme for the review of speed limits and to agree appropriate action.
- 9.3 Agrees to consider further reports on the review of speed limits should this require material changes to the strategy or spending profile outlined in the Derbyshire and Derby Joint Local Transport Plans for 2006 to 2011.

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