

To: Maidstone Joint Transportation Board

By: KCC Highways and Transportation

Date: 30th July 2024

Subject: Petition – Request for safety (speed) cameras on A20 Ashford Road and amendments to existing speed limits

Classification: Information Only

Summary: This information report provides an update regarding the petition received requesting improvements along the A20 between Willington Street and M20 junction 8.

1.0 Context and background

1.1

The A20 Ashford Road is a main distributor route between Ashford and Maidstone serving a number of villages and parishes in between the two towns. The road varies in nature along its length from being dual carriageway and single carriageway with a number of roundabout, priority and traffic light junctions. There is a major roundabout junction connecting to the M20 junction 8 just west of Leeds and Hollingbourne. In terms of environment there is a mixture of retail, urban and rural sections along the road and speed limits currently vary from 30mph, 40mph, 50mph and derestricted.

1.2

On 3rd May 2024 a petition was received. An online version of the petition was produced via Change.org and publicised on local social media initiated by concerned residents. The petition makes particular reference to the length of the A20 from the M20 junction 8 roundabouts heading west through Bearsted to the junction with Willington Street. This length of road is approximately 3km in length, with a 30mph speed limit between Willington Street and Lilk Hill, and a derestricted speed limit between Lilk Hill and M20 Junction 8. The petition requested installation of speed (safety) cameras along the A20 Bearsted and a reduction in speed limit from the current derestricted speed limit near Junction 8, with an extension of the 30mph speed limit from Lilk Hill.

The same matter was discussed on 23rd February when a meeting took place between the local MP Helen Whately, KCC Highways and Transportation Cabinet Member Neil Baker, Local KCC Member Shellina Prendergast, various parish council representatives and KCC officers to discuss concerns about speeding and highway safety along the A20. This meeting was requested by parish councils located along the A20 and spanned a greater length of the A20 than that specified in this petition from Lenham to Maidstone town centre.

Google aerial image below of the extents of the A20 in question.



2.0 Actions to date

2.1

Enhancements to the help highlight the existing 30mph speed limit were requested by Bearsted Parish Council in their parish highway improvement plan (HIP) in 2022/23. In response to this a new upgraded 30mph speed limit gateway was installed on A20 Ashford Road as you enter Bearsted just west of Otham Lane in July 2023. This involved red surfacing, virtual road narrowings and new speed limit signage as shown in the image below.



2.2

Following the meeting on 23rd February 2024 officers are carrying out detailed assessments of speed, traffic and crash data along the A20 corridor between Lenham and Maidstone town

centre. A number of automated traffic counts (ATC) surveys have been commissioned along the length of the A20 corridor and the crash data has been analysed in detail. In addition to this a detailed route study has been carried out.

3.0 Outcome of route study

3.1

Comparatively, the A20 exhibits medial levels of historic risk when compared to similar routes in the county. Whilst it has seen a relatively high number of collisions per mile of road, it exhibits lower collisions per mile travelled, indicating that the road environment is relatively safe but is frequently used. There are three cluster site locations identified along the A20 route, these have been reviewed independently. None of these cluster sites were within the Bearsted area between Willington Street and M20 Junction 8.

Across all route sections, turning collisions were common and abnormally frequent compared to other A roads. Turning collisions occurred at many junctions and some private residents and access points. Whilst the road environment or road layout was not considered a contributory factor in any of these turn collisions (based on the Police reports).

The A20 exhibited a higher-than-expected number of KSI collisions, however there was no increase in the norm for “fatal five” (careless driving, speeding, distracted driving, drug and alcohol impairment, not wearing a seatbelt) causation, or collisions involving vulnerable road users. In fact, the proportion of pedestrian and cyclist casualties was lower than expected for this type of route. Motorcyclists were involved in a larger proportion of KSI collisions. Common themes for these collisions throughout the route was a failing on road users to adequately accommodate for one another on the road, and careless and reckless driving coupled with failure to judge other people’s path and speed, leading to a number of multi-vehicle collisions.

It was discussed that the changing function of the route through its length may be contributing to a number of these collisions. The route serves both exchange (providing access to shops and residential areas) and flow (using the route to move to other parts of the county) functions. At times, these functions may be in conflict, such as through Bearsted and Harrietsham, resulting in road users failing to identify the different risks posed by the surrounding road environment and traffic mix. Many collisions throughout the route in both the high and lower speed limit sections involved multiple vehicles and had some attributes of drivers failing to pay adequate care and attention. Some local education or messaging on the need to share the road and focus to changes in the road environment may be prudent. This could influence a number of road users based on the postcode analysis of those involved in the collisions. Efforts to keep traffic flow moving steadily may also limit driver frustration.

4.0 Setting speed limits, Bearstead Parish HIP actions.

4.1

Bearsted Parish Council through their Highway Improvement Plan raised concerns of:

- Vehicles travelling above 60mph in the derestricted part of the A20
- Vehicles entering 30mph built up area and failing to adhere to the change in speed limit to 30mph

Bearsted Parish Council suggested:

- Extending the start of the 30mph limit or making the start of the 30 more visible. (Addressed by the aforementioned project at the gateway).
- Reducing the speed limit from national between Lilk Hill and Roundwell to 40mph or 50mph.

4.2

The speed limit on a road should reflect the local environment, nature of the road and its use. The Department for Transport sets out how speed limits should be set in the Circular 01/2013 - Setting Local Speed Limits and KCC follow this guidance with any new requests. Speed limits should not be used to warn of single hazards but relate to the whole road environment.

4.3

A change in the posted speed limit alone will rarely make a notable change to the actual speeds of vehicles being driven along a road. Typically, a reduction of only 1-2mph is achieved through signing alone. Also, the minimum length of a speed limit should generally be not less than 600 metres to avoid too many changes of speed limit along the route. It should also be noted that if the average speeds are already below the target limit, the average speed is likely to rise to meet the new speed limit.

4.5

There must be a suitable location to install the signs at each end of the limit as well as any repeater signs. (i.e. sufficient highway land, good visibility of the signs, clear of obscuring vegetation etc).

- History of collisions (frequency, severity, types, causes etc.)
- Road geometry (width, sightlines, bends, junctions, accesses etc.)
- Road function (strategic, through traffic, local access etc.)
- Composition of road users (existing & potential levels of vulnerable road users etc.) / Existing traffic speeds
- Road environment (road-side development etc.) / Impacts on residents (severance, noise, air quality etc.)

4.6

When considering a speed limit change, we must look at whether we are likely to obtain compliance with the newly posted speed limit and that, as such, we have to be mindful of existing speeds and potential compliance of the desired limit. In the case of A20 Ashford Road, to reduce the speed limit from derestricted to 30mph we would want to see existing average speeds of below 35mph which is the enforcement threshold (10% + 2) in a 30mph (the desired speed limit). This is because a speed reduction through signage alone does not yield more than a 1 or 2mph reduction and therefore Kent Police only support changes to a speed limit where existing speeds indicate that there would be reasonable compliance with a reduced speed limit. Artificially low speed limits place unrealistic enforcement burden on Kent Police and as such they are unsupportive of such changes. The automated traffic count (ATC) carried out in the Bearsted section of the A20 recorded average speeds of 43.3mph westbound and 42mph eastbound.

4.7

Changing speed limits can often have a negative impact on actual driven speeds. A derestricted

speed limit does not require drivers to travel at 60mph, the DfT outlines that this is an indication that drivers need to drive to the road environment and adjust their speed accordingly. Derestricted speed limits do not require repeater signs, when installing a 40mph or 50mph limit repeater signs legally have to be installed and this can act as a target speed for drivers to aim for thus causing an increase in speeds to occur.

5.0 Safety Camera Criteria and Speedwatch

5.1

The Kent and Medway Safety Camera Partnership was formed in July 2002, in order to reduce death and serious injuries on Kent and Medway's roads. It is responsible for the operation of safety cameras within Kent and Medway. The Partnership consists of Kent County Council, Medway Council, National Highways and Kent Police. All tickets and back of office functions related to cameras are carried out by Kent Police, who are also the authority which collect any fines.

5.2

The criteria for safety cameras set by KMSCP is:

- Fixed safety cameras can be installed where three or more people have been killed or seriously injured in speed-related crashes, over a 1.5km stretch of road, in the three years prior to installation. Or where there has been a history of speed-related crashes at single sites or along a route where a robust investigation by the relevant local highway authority has determined a safety camera to be the most appropriate measure to mitigate evidenced crashes.

- The use of safety cameras should be seen as a last resort measure, once all other justifiable solutions have been exhausted.

5.3

Bearsted Parish Council are in the process of setting up a Speedwatch group to help monitor speeds in the 30mph limit on the A20. Speedwatch groups are run by volunteers from the local area, who utilise speed radar guns and other equipment from the Police. In some cases KCC can assist with funding Speedwatch equipment in liaison with Kent Police. When a driver is caught driving in excess of the speed limit by a Speedwatch volunteer, they receive a letter from the Police. KCC Highway Improvements Team have offered to assist with the purchase of Speedwatch equipment.

6.0 Reviewing ATC and Speed Data

6.1

To prioritise our resources we must be intelligence led so that safety interventions are directed by research and analysis of data. Our core function and investment is targeted at locations with a history of traffic collisions resulting in injury. This guides the investigation and implementation of engineering measures to reduce injury at these known locations.

6.2

Whilst we will continue to react to personal injury data, we also develop a more proactive approach to prioritise investment in line with the safe systems approach. This means we seek to understand the risks of injury that are posed to road users by the environment and seek to minimise those risks before they become problem locations. To this end we have and are continuing to investigate with emerging technologies, trial methodologies and engage in research to develop this approach.

6.4

To date various traffic surveys have been commissioned along the A20, including three within the sections of road the petition is concerned with.

6.5

ATC within 30mph speed limit near Lilk Hill junction

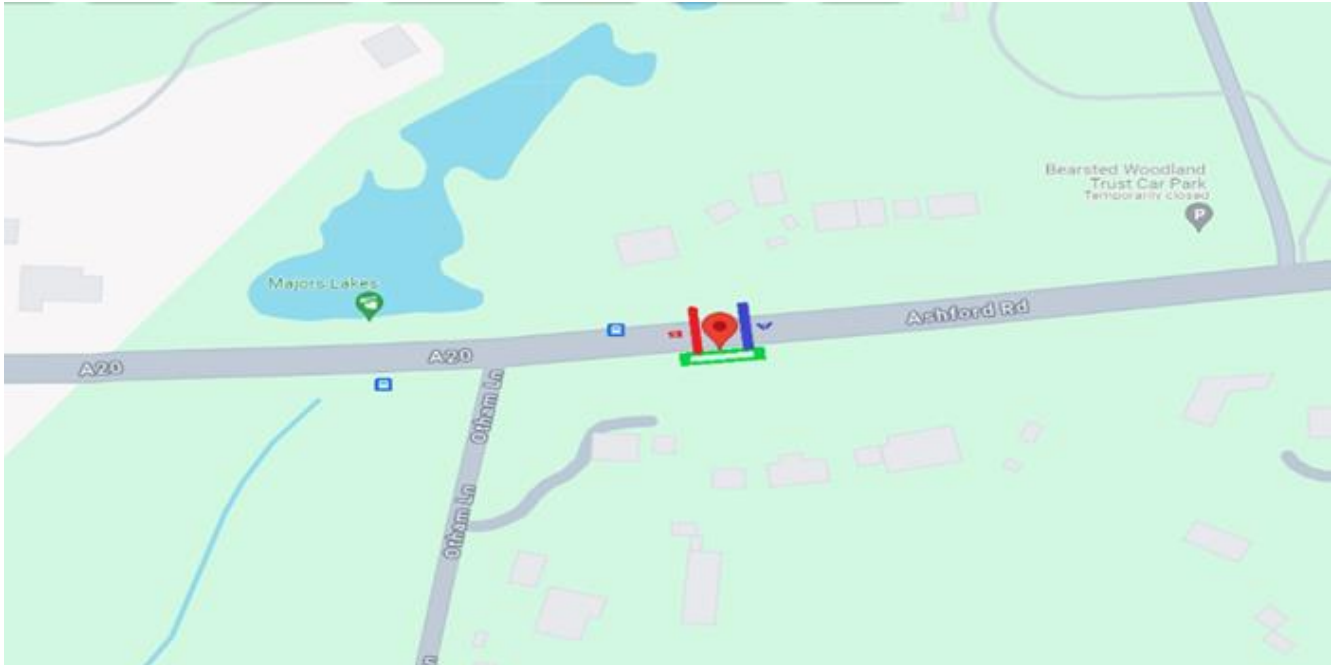


Ashford Road (30mph speed limit)					
Direction	Number of Vehicles	Average speed over 7 days	85 percentile speeds	Percentage of vehicles complying with the 30mph speed limit	Percentage of vehicles under enforcement threshold of 35mph
E1	39853	34mph	39.2mph	21.5% (8554)	62.3% (24814)
W0	47037	32mph	37.4mph	41.4% (19486)	75% (35262)

The ATC within the 30 limit, was carried out between 26th February 2024 and 3rd March 2024, recorded average speeds of 34 mph, with 62.3% of vehicles under enforcement threshold travelling West and 75% of vehicles under enforcement threshold travelling East.

6.6

ATC within derestricted section of A20, east of Otham Lane junction, approximately 120 metres east of the start of the 30mph speed limit.

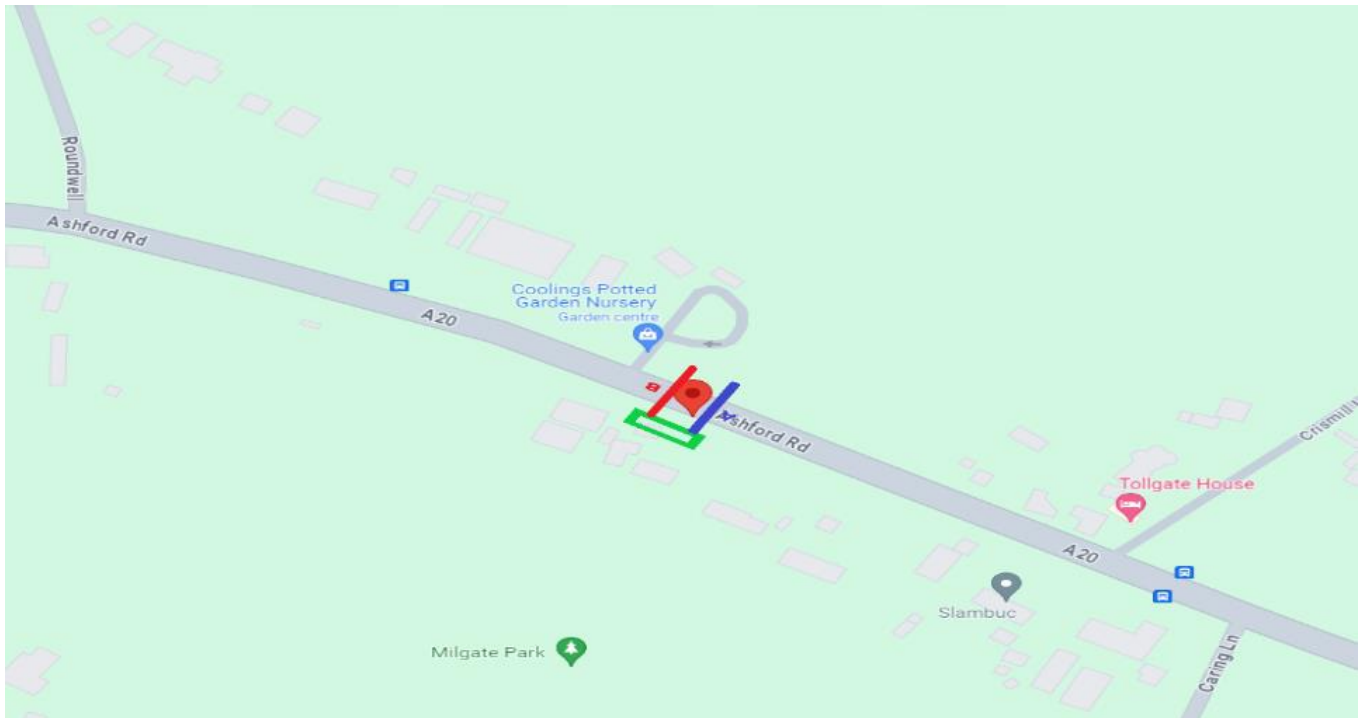


A20 / Otham Lane (60mph speed limit)						
Direction	Number of Vehicles	Average speed over 7 days	85 percentile speeds	Percentage of vehicles complying with the 60mph speed limit	Percentage of vehicles under enforcement threshold of 68mph	Percentage of vehicles complying with a proposed signed only 40mph speed
E1	44163	42mph	47.8mph	99% (43727)	99.7% (44037)	37.7% (16657)
W0	47458	43.3mph	48.8mph	99% (46994)	99.8% (47366)	26.6% (12609)

The ATCs on the A20 east of Otham Lane which collected data between 9th May 2024 to the 15th May 2024, recorded average speeds of 42.6 mph with 99.7%% of vehicles under the enforcement threshold. The number of drivers that would comply with a 40mph speed limit based on this data is very low, based on current driven speeds just over 32% of drivers would travel at a 40mph speed limit along this section of the A20, which means that over 30,000 drivers would not.

6.7

ATC within derestricted stretch of road east of Roundwell junction.



A20 / Coolings (60mph speed limit)						
Direction	Number of Vehicles	Average speed over 7 days	85 percentile speeds	Percentage of vehicles complying with the 60mph speed limit	Percentage of vehicles under enforcement threshold of 68mph	Percentage of vehicles complying with a proposed signed only 40mph speed
E1	46558	41.1mph	47.5mph	99.3% (46221)	99.8% (46474)	40.4% (18822)
W0	50780	42.3mph	48mph	99.3% (50418)	99.9% (50719)	32.1% (16299)

The ATCs on the A20 near Coolings Nursery, east of Roundwell junction, collected data between 9th May 2024 to the 15th May 2024. The surveys recorded average speeds of 41.7 mph with 99.8% of vehicles under the enforcement threshold. The number of drivers that would comply with a 40mph speed limit based on this data is very low, based on current driven speeds just over 36% of drivers would travel at a 40mph speed limit along this section of the A20, which means that over 60,000 drivers would not.

6.8

When considering a safety camera, the previously mentioned criteria laid out by the KMSCP must be met, most notably “Fixed safety cameras can be installed where three or more people have been killed or seriously injured in speed-related crashes, over a 1.5km stretch of road, in the three years prior to installation.”

In the past 3 years, there has been one serious injury collision within the 30 limit on the A20. Therefore this section of road does not meet the criteria for a safety camera.

The petition also mentioned traffic calming measures. There has been a longstanding agreement between KCC and the emergency services that KCC will not install physical traffic calming measures (humps, bumps and chicanes etc) on A roads. As such, we are unable to physically calm the A20. Traffic calming is not only used to reduce speeds but also to discourage drivers taking less suitable roads as through routes. As this is a major distributor road and a classified A road, this would not a suitable candidate for physical traffic calming measures.

6.9

Setting local speed limit guidance states when investigating a speed limit change we need to consider whether we are likely to obtain compliance with the newly posted speed limit. As such, we will only consider a change of speed limit in isolation of other measures where the majority of vehicles are already consistently below the enforceable speed of the desired limit (46mph in a 40mph). Between Lilk Hill and M20 Junction 8 the data does demonstrate that we would achieve the compliance necessary at this location to gain support from Kent Police as the enforcement authority, this also accords with officers' observations on site.

Despite the average speed figures displaying there would be reasonable compliance with a 40mph limit, the section of the A20 between Lilk Hill and M20 Junction 8 does not meet the criteria set out by the Department for Transport (DfT) in Setting Local Speed Limits.

The criteria for a 60mph speed limit is:

Recommended for most high-quality strategic A and B roads with few bends, junctions or accesses.

The criteria for a 40mph limit is:

Should be considered where there are many bends, junctions or accesses, substantial development, a strong environmental or landscape reason, or where there are considerable numbers of vulnerable road users.

KCC officers assessments of the site find that the A20 Ashford Road between Lilk Hill and M20 Junction 8 fits the criteria for the existing speed limit due to its rural nature. Although the traffic survey data may support a reduction to a 40mph limit through the national speed limit, officers' opinion is little is to be gained by changing the current speed limit as traffic speeds are, in the main already travelling below the existing speed limit through this section.

This stretch of the A20 is rural in nature and undeveloped and properties are set back from the road, with few bends, junctions or accesses. Therefore, drivers would appear to be driving to what they can see, as there are currently no speed limit signs present through this section. Implementing artificially low speed limits in less built-up areas can actually have a negative impact on lower speed limit roads nearby as drivers become desensitised to lower speed limits elsewhere. Additionally, if the speed limit was lowered, repeater signs would be required which may encourage those drivers currently travelling at lower speeds to travel faster which could result in collisions, where currently crash patterns do not exist.

7.0 Conclusion

7.1

The route study found that the A20 road environment has a good general safety record for a classified A road. Whilst there is a higher-than-average number of collisions per mile of road, there is a lower-than-average collisions per mile travelled. There are no crash cluster site locations within the scope of the petition, which means that crash data does not demonstrate there is a pattern of incidents.

The average speed recorded within the 30mph limit was above 30mph, but within the 10% + 2mph enforcement threshold (35mph) set by the police. As such there would not be considered a speeding issue at this location and it is difficult to justify any changes to the highway, especially when considering there has been one injury collision within the last 3 years. Officers continue to liaise with Bearsted Parish Council via their Highway Improvement Plan regarding this location.

The derestricted section of the A20 between Lilk Hill and M20 junction 8 meets the criteria for the existing speed limit due to its rural nature according to the Department for Transport Setting Local Speed Limits Criteria. Average speeds are below the existing speed limit and as such, it

could be argued there would be little gain from lowering the speed limit. The measured speed data does not preclude the opportunity to reduce the speed limit with supporting engineering measures. This will be investigated further as part of the wider A20 Lenham to Maidstone assessment.

Whist turning collisions were abnormally frequent compared to other A roads, the road environment or road layout was not considered a contributory factor in any of these turn collisions (based on the Police reports). The main factors listed were due to driver error.

KCC and Bearsted Parish Council are committed to helping set up a Speedwatch group in Bearsted, and it is hoped that volunteers will come forward following this petition. Data from an active Speedwatch group helps Kent Police decide where to prioritise sites for speed enforcement.

Separate from the petition to which this report refers, the A20 through Bearsted is also to be reviewed as part of the wider A20 corridor assessment to ensure a holistic approach is being applied, as well as a more focussed review of the A20 between Lilk Hill and M20 Junction 8. Due to this ongoing assessment KCC are not considering isolated speed limit changes at the current time along this corridor.

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