



Reply to:
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Mr Rupert Clubb
Director of Communities, Economy and Transport
East Sussex County Council
County Hall
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9 March 2023

Dear Mr Clubb

Piddinghoe Feasibility Study Report ABSL-1315

This is Piddinghoe Parish Council's formal response to the feasibility study report we commissioned from ESCC Highways in early 2022 and finally received on 13 January 2023. Our county councillor Sarah Osborne is in copy.

This response follows a consultation with parishioners, amongst whom the report has been widely circulated in full as well as in summary. It also follows the full meeting of the parish council held on Tuesday 7 March 2023.

You will not be surprised to know that the report is a considerable disappointment both to the council and to residents. At the initial site meeting the appreciation shown by your project manager Peter Heasman of the significant risks to safety posed by the speed and volume of traffic at the village's north and south junctions had raised our hopes. The least we could expect, we felt, was a recommendation that the 40mph speed limit should be extended from the northern edge of Newhaven up to Deans Farm.

In addition, with the obviously difficult geometry and poor sightlines at both junctions, plus at the north end, the imminent prospect of increased pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians on the Egrets Way, we anticipated that much more could and should be done to reduce the risks taken by those exiting onto or crossing the C7 at these points.

Even though extending the 40mph speed limit was the principal focus of our site meeting discussions the report declares that the parish council had not pressed for this. Moreover in commissioning the study we insisted that the future completion of the Egrets Way (Phase 7 from Piddinghoe to Deans Farm) be taken into consideration. Insofar as this missing link in this strategic shared path will need to involve an on-highway solution from the Harping Hill pinch-point a future speed limit reduction will inevitably be a regulatory requirement. Yet this crucial factor, while noted, is simply disregarded in the report's conclusions.

I need to convey to you the anger expressed in the public gallery at our council meeting this week. You will be aware that in the C7 survey undertaken in 2021 Piddinghoe returned the highest level of response and recorded the greatest degree of concern of all the Lower Ouse villages. The C7 is felt by many to be perilous to exit onto by car, yet alone to cross, to walk alongside or to cycle on. The footways are poorly maintained and cease beyond Harping Hill. The elderly and schoolchildren who particularly rely on the bus avoid using it into Lewes because reaching the stop feels so dangerous. Residents are frustrated and furious at the county council's continuing lack of effective response.

The report reads like an institutional shrug of the shoulders. It suggests the most that can be done is to lower a kerb, rebuild a footway, perhaps change road surface colours and markings, renew signs and cut back vegetation. Such measures for both the southern and northern junctions, that the report accepts will have only a marginal impact, are nevertheless costed in all at over £200,000, a price the brunt of which a parish council with a precept of just £11.5k a year you invite to bear. They even include recurring maintenance elements - clearing footways and vegetation, renewing faded and damaged signage - that are the county council's routine responsibilities.

Yet an extension of the existing 40mph speed limit - the one change that would signal most clearly to motorists that the C7 is not a National Park racetrack but that they may well encounter turning village traffic, farm traffic, residents emerging from drives, pedestrians, ramblers, cyclists and horse-riders - this straightforward and likely economical measure is dismissed as 'not feasible'.

The report claims that the safety record of the first few miles of the 50mph limit out of Newhaven is 'very good' (5.17); yet already this year we have witnessed a mini on its roof in a neighbouring field on the approach to the Piddinghoe southern junction. Moreover any lack of reported incidents, you must surely be aware, is because crossing, walking or cycling along this stretch of the C7 is perceived by most people to be too dangerous to contemplate. Most villagers effectively feel unable to proceed north from Piddinghoe by any means other than by car.

However the greatest disappointment in the report is its dismissal of Phase 7 of the Egrets Way as a complication. On the contrary, it is an opportunity. The Egrets Way is a strategically important connection in the county's - and England's - cycling network. At present this multi-use path reaches from Newhaven as far as the Piddinghoe northern junction and restarts towards Lewes 800m later at Deans Farm. From this summer it promises to pour an increased flow of pedestrians and cyclists onto the C7 into 50mph traffic at this most dangerous point. They will either cross to and from the current

bridleway up Harping Hill, or proceed on the C7 itself, where there is no footway and barely a verge, to and from Deans Farm.

Although this missing link is yet to be finally designed, we understand it is already largely negotiated with private landowners and with funders including the SDNPA and National Highways. There is little doubt that this segment of the Egrets Way needs to be, and will in due course be completed.

Your report recognises that the pinch-point at this northern Piddinghoe junction necessitates an on-highway shared path that would significantly change the road environment and under the latest regulations would require a lower speed limit. Would it not make absolute sense therefore for the county council to be smartly strategic, to anticipate this change, to act now to extend the 40mph speed limit from Newhaven as far as Deans Farm - to improve, perhaps save, lives ahead of time? If it's felt that motorists will not heed a lower speed limit on a road like this, why not trial it and see?

In conclusion, we ask that as the report proposes in 5.18 you do indeed urgently proceed to undertake traffic surveys to confirm the speed and volume of traffic here. In the meantime we would be grateful to have sight of the supporting risk assessment together with further details of the 'significant engineering measures' that leads the report to conclude that an extension of the 40mph speed limit would not be feasible.

In tandem I would also be pleased if you and I could meet, ideally involving SDNPA and Egrets Way colleagues, in order constructively to explore the real opportunities we see to progress this matter.

With kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Bevan', written over a horizontal line.

Paul Bevan
Chair
Piddinghoe Parish Council

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cc Cllr Sarah Osborne