

**TO:** SWALE JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD  
**DATE:** 26 June 2006  
**SUBJECT:** Sittingbourne High Street – Pedestrian Safety  
**BY:** Transportation Manager - Mid Kent  
**Classification:** Unrestricted

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**Summary:** Update on progress with Sittingbourne High Street and pedestrian safety Issues

**Decision Required:** For decision

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## **History**

1. At the meeting of this Board on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2006 Members were asked to note the outcome of a site meeting at Sittingbourne High Street involving members of Swale Access Group (SAG), Kent Highway Services, Swale Borough Council and the Ward Member/County Councillor for the town centre.
2. The meeting was for Swale Access Group to identify the safety problems, to officers, that are dangers to pedestrians with mobility impairment. At the meeting it was agreed to undertake list of minor improvements and action to deal with the majority of the issues raised. These are outlined in the March 2006 report.
3. A further issue raised by the access group concerned the lack of a formal crossing facility (i.e. pelican or zebra crossing) in the High Street to help pedestrians with mobility impairment to cross the road with greater confidence.

## **Introduction**

4. This report considers the concerns raised by SAG relating to pedestrian safety in Sittingbourne High Street and the need to give pedestrians priority at all times.
5. On this point SAG sought the opinion of PC Bryant the Community Liaison Officer at Sittingbourne Police Station. In his response PC Bryant confirmed that the traffic calming measures introduced in Sittingbourne High Street were designed to reduce and maintain a low speed of traffic along the High Street in order to provide a safer environment for all highway users including pedestrians.
6. At present there are a number of informal crossing points along the High Street at the traffic calming features where the road level is raised and flush with the pavement to assist pedestrians, including pedestrians with push chairs and in particular wheel chair users. There is also, a pedestrian demand initiated crossing at the traffic signal controlled junction of High Street with Bell Road to help pedestrians cross Bell Road with integrated red light controlled phases to help pedestrians cross High Street and East Street.

## **Sittingbourne High Street**

7. Sittingbourne High Street was traffic calmed in 1995/6. The scheme involved making the High Street, Station Street, Central Avenue and part of West Street one-way. Speed

ramps were introduced along the High Street as well as designated parking bays with a 20 minute maximum parking limit. A no right turn into Park Road was also introduced.

8. Sittingbourne High Street is also closed to vehicular traffic every Saturday between 10am and 5pm.

## **Personal Injury Crash History**

9. In the last three year period up to 31 December 2005 there have been 5 (1 serious and 4 slight) personal injury crashes (PICs) recorded in Sittingbourne High Street. The majority of these incidents occurred close to the junctions of Central Avenue and Bell Road. 3 of the 5 incidents included pedestrian casualties and were generally of the type where driver error was not the cause .

## **Discussion**

10. The High Street is the centre of commercial and shopping activity in Sittingbourne town centre and therefore it is naturally expected to experience a high concentration of pedestrian traffic throughout the working day and reduced activity during the evening period of the day. The traffic calming and one-way system was introduced in 1995 to create a safer environment for this typical town centre activity. The single most important objective being to reduce the number of vehicular traffic conflicts and speed so that pedestrians are able to cross the High Street along its length in relative safety. This was the preferred means of improving general highway safety rather than the introduction of pedestrian guard rails to channel pedestrians at one or two formal crossing places along the High Street at a zebra or pelican crossing.
11. As referred to earlier in this report there are a number informal crossing points along the High Street at the traffic calming features where the road has been elevated to sit flush with the pavement. From a legal point of view the provision use of informal crossing places in the highway does not automatically assign any right of priority to pedestrians over vehicular traffic or for that matter to drivers over pedestrians. They do not afford any further rights to a pedestrian over that of a pedestrian crossing at any other part of the road. The Highways Act 1980 does impose a duty of care on the highway authority to provide a safe highway environment for all highway users and the traffic calming scheme and one-way system was introduced in 1995 in pursuit of a safer highway environment.
12. It is important to point out that the existing measures in the High Street struck the right balance between improving highway safety and minimising the environmental impact on the High Street scene.
13. The traffic calming scheme fully complies with the design standards and Kent best practice and includes the appropriate traffic signs, as prescribed by the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2002, for the purpose of providing adequate warning of the presence of road humps to persons using the highway. The scheme was the subject of extensive consultation with interest groups and stakeholders whose views helped to inform the final choice of scheme.
14. The Department for Transport has encouraged the use of tactile surfaces at all crossing points whether formal or informal, to inform blind persons of the presence of a dropped kerb. Where road humps are installed there may or may not be a dropped kerb. Tactile surfaces are not signs and are not prescribed by any legislation. They are not intended to indicate the only place where pedestrians should cross but the most appropriate place should pedestrians wish to cross. It is on this basis that the current traffic calming scheme is considered to provide a safer environment for all road users in Sittingbourne town centre.
15. The problem SAG is raising is that while there can be opportunities to cross the High Street, the partially sighted are not able to identify these opportunities because there is

nothing to let them know that the road is clear. For example, if a zebra crossing were installed, this gives priority to pedestrians over motor vehicles.

16. A more formal method would be the introduction of a pelican crossing. However, because of the low traffic volumes a pelican crossing would be difficult to justify: pedestrians would continue to cross the road along its length and also at the crossing points without waiting for the correct signal instruction. The location of the crossing would also be difficult to identify because there is no clear cut desire line. In addition to this the use of pedestrian guard railing would deter from the open and uncluttered street scene which was an important environmental consideration.
17. Closure of the High Street for a limited period on a daily basis is a more comprehensive option to consider but this needs to be judged more carefully against the commercial and economic needs of the High Street businesses and general accessibility. Kent Highway Services have indicated to work with our Swale colleagues to achieve this goal, but as a town centre management issue, it would need to be led and operated, if approved, by Swale Borough Council.
18. In consideration of all of the above it is clear that a full and proper study of the High Street is needed and this is something that should be informed by the future master-planning of the Sittingbourne town centre. This work is still on-going so it would be premature to make an earlier start on this type of study. However, there are some interim measures that are possible which will address the main concerns raised by SAG and they are set out in the Recommendations to this Board.

## **Decision Required**

That Members note the report and recommend that

- (1) The following short term works/actions are carried out by Kent Highway Services:
  - Paint the existing bollards in the High Street in a conspicuous colour with the agreement of the Borough Councils conservation officer;
  - Action be taken against traders trading on the footway;
  - Re-orient existing benches and relocate litter bins to pedestrians;
  - Introduce tactile paving at specific carriageway/footway interfaces to make help the partially sighted and blind;
  - Introduce tactile paving at the pedestrian crossing facilities in Station Street/High Street junction.
- (2) To review the existing signage and investigate the need for any additional signage that will indicate to motorists that pedestrians have priority over vehicular traffic using the High Street between the entrance to the Forum and Bell Road. As this type of sign is not currently covered by legislation, an approach to the Secretary of State for Transport will be needed to gain approval.
- (3) To investigate the potential to close the High Street to all vehicular traffic for a limited period on a daily basis and report back to this Board with the results.

*Contact Officers:*

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*Background Documents:*

Sittingbourne High Street - Swale Joint Transportation Board Report - 27<sup>th</sup> March 2006

Letter (dated 22/03/06) from PC Bryant from the Crime Reduction Unit at Sittingbourne Police Station