

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE		
DATE:	12 MARCH 2015	AGENDA ITEM:	6
TITLE:	PETITION FOR A ZEBRA CROSSING OUTSIDE ENGLISH MARTYRS CATHOLIC SCHOOL ON DEE ROAD - UPDATE		
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To report to the Sub-Committee an initial response to a petition asking the Council to install a zebra crossing outside English Martyrs Catholic School on Dee Road.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Sub-Committee notes the report.
- 2.2 That the offer made to provide a school crossing patrol outside English Martyrs is taken up to commence as soon as possible.
- 2.3 The wider traffic concerns raised by both schools are investigated further and solutions promoted to make a safer, accessible, child friendly road to ensure the safety of all children and a further report submitted to the Sub-Committee for consideration at a future meeting. This will include the provision of a zebra crossing(s) at the most suitable location(s) and as a part of a wider package of road safety measures for public consultation.
- 2.4 That the lead petitioner be informed accordingly.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The provision of pedestrian crossing facilities and associated criteria is specified within existing Traffic Management Policies and Standards.

4. THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 As a result of the petition presented to Traffic Management Sub-committee on 15th January 2015 a meeting was held on Wednesday 28th January at St Michaels School to discuss the concerns raised. The meeting included representatives from both English Martyrs Catholic School and St Michaels Primary School alongside ward councillors, council officers, the lead petitioner and Alok Sharma MP. The Objective of the petition was discussed at this meeting. The objective of the petition, as presented, being: is *'to make a safer, accessible, child friendly road to ensure the safety of our children! When crossing a VERY busy road to access our school, whilst the road is currently 20mph, drivers go excessively faster than this causing frequent near misses'*. The petition concludes with the aim *'For a zebra crossing to be installed outside English Martyrs school.'*
- 4.2 The discussions at the meeting on 28th January expanded upon the concerns raised at TM Sub-committee on 15th January where both schools expressed issues relating to, in particular, driver behaviour. We heard concerns not only about speeding but also of frustration and annoyance expressed by drivers towards parents and children crossing the road outside both schools. It is felt that due to the impact to traffic flow that both schools create on Dee Road some drivers behave recklessly creating the greatest concern to pedestrian safety. We heard of drivers pulling up onto the footway, blocking driveways, worrying reversing manoeuvres, overtaking and excessive speeds. Much of the concern is aimed at parents of children that attend either schools as they attempt to get as close as possible to the school gate.
- 4.3 There is a context issue that needs to be explained and understood as a part of this report. The two schools are situated at the western end of Dee Road (at the top of the hill) and there is already traffic calming in place. The whole part of Dee Road that the schools are located within is subjected to a 20mph limit with speed cushions introduced as a part of the safer routes to schools scheme delivered in the late 1990s and early 2000s. From a road safety perspective the safer routes to schools scheme appears to have been successful as the area is casualty free. However there is worry and concern from those using the road at school time despite the measures in place. Both schools have SCHOOL KEEP CLEAR markings across their main

entrances and pedestrian crossing points have been constructed. There are school warning signs on the approaches to the 20mph area with flashing (wig-wag) warning signs. There is a history of a school crossing patrol operating outside St Michaels School who, as a part of the role, turned on the flashing warning signs. The area is residential and there are multi-access points to private driveway parking. In addition there are three junctions within the 20mph area, Elan Close to west of St Michaels school entrance with Elvaston Way at a mid-point between the two schools and Tern Close just a little further east of Elvaston Way. The two school crossing points constructed as a part of the safer routes to school scheme are approximately 200 meters apart with St Michaels School around 120 meters east of the junction of The Meadway. The traffic signals are equipped with controlled pedestrian crossings across all three vehicle approaches to the junction. It has been observed that some parents park outside the parade of shops on The Meadway. By doing this, children can be walked to school using the crossing facilities at the junction whilst parents can avoid adding the traffic issues around the immediate area of the schools. There are a number of significant differences between the two schools. St Michaels School, whilst it has a wide catchment area, mainly serves the local community with many of its pupils living within a mile of the school. There are a significant number of children attending from the Elvaston Way and Hardwick Road area and within a relatively short walking distance. English Martyrs has a much wider catchment area resulting in larger numbers arriving at the school by car. The school has created a circular drop-off facility within the car park at the front of the premises. Opening times of the two schools also differ as do the extra-curriculum activities (for example; breakfast club and after school clubs). St Michaels School is currently being expanded as a part of our school place expansion programme. As a part of this St Michaels School will increase in pupil numbers therefore its school travel plan is currently being updated as a planning requirement. There have been two traffic surveys carried out as a part of the St Michaels school expansion, the most recent within the last 4-6 weeks. This data of this second survey is still to be presented.

- 4.4. The issues of driver behaviour discussed at the 28th January meeting have been raised with us by St Michaels School and to some degree English Martyrs the past. There is also a wider concern of speeding on Dee Road outside of the 20 mph area. The Neighbourhood Action Group, responding to these concerns, has carried out their own speed survey in conjunction with Thames Valley Police. This does show a higher than average speed that would otherwise be expected for such a residential street. This higher speed is likely to be due to the more rural feel of the hilly and wooded part of Dee Road. Nevertheless, there is concern of the speed on this section of road and during the

meeting the lack of pedestrian crossings (on the hill) was also raised. The success of the new pedestrian islands in Tilehurst delivered as part of the annual road safety review was mentioned that the question is asked whether or not Dee Rd can benefit from similar treatment. St Michaels School renewed their own request for a formal crossing outside their school gate to deal with the issues that concern their parents and children.

- 4.5. Where a school crossing patrol has been present in the past some of the driver behavioural issues have been less so. However, whilst this improves the experience for parents and children there are some drivers that will intimidate and be abusive towards school crossing patrollers from time to time. At the 28th January meeting there were offers to help provide a school crossing patrol (for English Martyrs) by those that attended. There is provision within our current budget to provide school crossing patrollers and, in principal, this can cover both schools. This offer should be taken up and can be led by the school with support from us as appropriate.
- 4.6. It is clear from the meeting and the wide range of concerns and issues raised that this is a challenging and complex area. It is easy to understand why a zebra crossing is being asked for. Although, some of the concerns raised, particularly the perception that drivers are taking risks as a result of frustration, create a real worry should a zebra crossing be installed without dealing with the wider issues. A zebra crossing gives pedestrians priority over vehicles. This may lead to a worsening of traffic conditions creating more frustration for drivers and leading to higher risks. With St Michaels School also requesting a zebra crossing the area will become even more complex with a worsening impact to drivers. With increased frustration drivers will be less likely to stop when they should at the zebra crossings. This will only increase risks to pedestrians and demand further action from us and/or the police to deal with the problem. Alternatives to zebra crossings are, of course, traffic signals or school crossing patrollers that will manage pedestrian flow better than a zebra. Promoting three sets of traffic signals within 350 meters of this section of Dee Road is likely to be unpopular and regarded as poor traffic management and use of public monies. Coordinating three sets of traffic lights when the main demand is for such a short period of time from pedestrians would be difficult to do. In these conditions it is likely that pedestrians will not wait for the traffic signals to change and cross when they feel safe to do so.
- 4.7 From the traffic surveys carried out so far there is a clear demand around school times for pedestrian facilities. Outside of the school times there is no demand for crossings within the area of the school gates. It is important to highlight that formal crossings also come

with parking restrictions preventing any stopping on the approaches to and exits from the crossing. Crossings installed outside both schools will impact residents and their ability to park. SCHOOL KEEP CLEAR markings are tailored to the school and do not apply overnight and at weekends thus allowing parking. Formal crossing zig-zag markings apply all of the time resulting in residents being unable to park at any time regardless of the school being closed. For this reason residents should be fully consulted on any formal crossing proposal in a similar way to any other waiting restriction that we would promote. Formal pedestrian crossings and their associated parking restrictions do not allow for this level of consultation and can be installed by notice. Whilst residents would, no doubt, support improvements in road safety outside their homes they may object to such a prescriptive solution for such a very limited time that schools affect them.

- 4.8 In conclusion, further work is required to seek solutions to the many issues raised by both schools as a zebra crossing outside English Martyrs alone will not solve these problems. With the changes at St Michaels School currently being carried out there is a need to reassess the traffic impact. This work should be extended to consider the whole area and include English Martyrs School. A wider range of measures is more likely make a safer, accessible, child friendly road to ensure the safety of all children outside both schools. The expansion of St Michaels School has resulted in monies being available to improve school travel and a wide range of measures (including formal crossings (if appropriate) shall be brought back to this committee later this year. In the meantime we should do everything that we can to support both schools in providing school crossing patrollers at both schools.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 To promote equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 The lead petitioner will be informed of the findings of the Sub-Committee.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 None arising from this report.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 In addition to the Human Rights Act 1998 the Council is required to comply with the Equalities Act 2010. Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010 requires the Council to have due regard to the need to:-

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

8.2 The Council will carry out an equality impact assessment scoping exercise prior to submitting the update report to a future meeting of the Sub-Committee.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None arising from this report.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 None.