

Residents of Eccup Deputation to Council

Date: March 2024

Report of: Chief Officer Highways & Transportation

Report to: Director of City Development

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

Brief summary

This report responds to the Deputation received at the meeting of the Council on the 15th November 2023 from Eccup residents “on behalf of all the residents of Leeds”. The deputation expressed safety concerns relating to the appropriateness of current national speed limits on rural roads, particularly when considering where these are used by pedestrians, cyclists, horse riders and wheelchair users. This Deputation requests that Leeds City Council supports a well-being zone pilot scheme within the rural environment, with the first scheme to start in the Eccup area. The aim of the Deputation is to make the road environment safer and more suitable for the many vulnerable road users who regularly frequent this area.

The Deputation argues that the benefits of such an approach would improve road safety, lead to lower emissions, aid mental health issues and reduce the pressures on the NHS.

Recommendations

The Director of City Development is requested to:

- a) note the contents of the report; and
- b) agree the actions set out in paragraphs 25, 26 and 27 in response to the Deputation.

What is this report about?

- 1 This report responds to the Deputation received at the meeting of the Council on the 15th November from residents of Eccup “on behalf of all residents within Leeds”. The Deputation expressed concerns relating to:
 - a) how dangerous country lanes have become due to historical speed limits prescribing a 60mph maximum speed on narrow winding lanes.
 - b) how many walkers and cyclists are too scared to get out into the countryside due to the dangers on these roads, because we now live in a society where many people have become extremely selfish, and cars are extremely powerful.

The Deputation requests that Leeds City Council supports a pilot scheme to create a rural well-being zone within the Eccup area. The Deputation claims that this would help improve road safety, reduce emissions, and support more active travel choices, which in turn will aid mental health and reduce pressures on the NHS.

- 2 Specific actions requested by the Deputation are:-
 - a) That Leeds City Council support a pilot scheme to create a well-being zone in the rural environment of Eccup.
 - b) That clear signage with images of walkers, wheelchair users, horse riders and cyclists be provided at the entry points to these zones, which will include the wording ‘Well-Being Zone’.
 - c) To request that a 20mph speed limit to be implemented in general in these zones with signs at the beginnings of all the roads leading into the zones, with reminder signs along the way.
 - d) Request that harsher penalties be given to selfish drivers who ignore the new situation.
- 3 Leeds City Council has a Best City ambition to improve life for the people of Leeds and make our city a better place. The Vision Zero 2040 commitment recently adopted by the council aspires to reduce the number of people seriously injured or killed on our roads to zero by 2040.
- 4 Steps to improve road safety are therefore a priority for Leeds City Council, especially for those who are more vulnerable such as pedestrians, cyclists, horse riders and motorcyclists and those who are young, older or who have a disability.
- 5 This report reviews the requests made by the Deputation and recommends an initial meeting with the representatives to better understand the issues raised particularly in relation to site locations and to discuss the existing Department for Transport (DfT) guidance on such issues. A subsequent meeting will then take place, once the specific locations are known, with the relevant local ward members for Alwoodley and/or Harewood, as requested at the Council meeting.

Background information

- 6 This Deputation has raised concerns relating to rural countryside lanes across Leeds which still have the historical national speed limit designation which applies to unrestricted roads (60mph for single carriageway roads without street lighting) and they consider that these speed limits, combined with a change in drivers attitudes and an increase in the ownership of extremely

powerful vehicles, have become a barrier to other road users enjoying the countryside and the associated health benefit of being outdoors and active.

- 7 The national speed limit is the default speed limit applied across England for unrestricted roads and is set by national legislation. Currently, this is 70mph for dual carriageway roads, 60mph for single carriageway roads without street lighting, and 30mph for single carriageway roads with street lighting. Where the local highway authority believes that a different speed limit should apply this is done through a legal order and signs are then placed to indicate the change. These speed limit reviews are conducted following national guidance published by the DfT.
- 8 Within Leeds there are a significant number of rural roads which have the national speed limit designation applied. It is important to note, that any signed speed limit is the absolute maximum and not a “target” speed; it does not mean it is safe to drive at that maximum speed in all conditions. The Highway Code makes it very clear that drivers should drive at an appropriate speed taking into account the indicated speed limit, the type of vehicle, road environment, layout and specific conditions.
- 9 Leeds City Council shares the general concerns raised by the Deputation and is committed to ensuring speed limits in both the rural and urban environments are fit for purpose and compliant with the national guidance. As part of Leeds City Council’s recently approved Vision Zero ambition, further work has commenced on reviewing some of the historical national speed limits and this year, is proposing to implement speed limit changes on five strategic rural routes, lowering these default national speed limits from 60mph limit to 50mph. These initial five routes have been identified and prioritised for funding against their existing injury collision record (above the national average for such roads) and casualty saving potential. Following the completion of this work in 2024, post evaluation studies will be undertaken to assess the injury collision saving benefits of these changes.
- 10 Existing national legislation and DfT guidance already exists for rural roads initiatives such as Quiet Lanes, Greenways and Green Lanes, where traffic volumes are very low. Depending on location, these options may be more appropriate to meet the aims of this Deputation, without the creation of a new well-being zone, which would almost certainly require specific approval from the DfT.
- 11 In addition to the above, another element of the Leeds City Council Vision Zero ambition is to request that the Department for Transport (DfT) review the current historical default rural (60 or 70mph) national speed limits, based on the principle that they may no longer be appropriate. At the present time, the DfT is consulting nationally in relation to the consideration to change the national default urban speed limit (road with a system of street lighting) from 30mph to 20mph, similar to the approach adopted in Wales recently. There seems considerable merit in these national speed limit reviews for both the urban and rural settings being run in parallel, and we will be engaging with the DfT on these matters
- 12 When considering access to the countryside, it is important to note that some rural roads do have a strategic function in facilitating the movement of traffic and goods in a safe and convenient manner. These routes often form part of the national strategic highway network and are designated as A or B classified routes for the purposes of moving traffic, including HGVs. It therefore may not be appropriate or proportionate to include roads with this function in a pilot scheme aimed at facilitating greater use by pedestrians and other vulnerable road users; one of the main reasons being the unintended consequence of diverting traffic on to more unsuitable routes.

- 13 Finally, when considering access to the countryside for vulnerable road users, particularly in the countryside setting, which in many cases do not have the same provisions provided in the urban road environment such as footways, street lighting and formal crossing points, it is worth noting that Leeds City Council continues to maintain and provide access to over 859km of rights of way, 650km of footpaths, 199km of bridleways and 11km of byways (as recorded on the Definitive Public Footpath Map). These routes are very safe and lead through varied and changing landscapes, from urban areas to the countryside within the Leeds district and beyond, in a tranquil and car free environment.
- 14 Leeds City Council agrees with the core sentiment of the Deputation in that the countryside should be used and enjoyed by all residents of Leeds, particularly our vulnerable road users, and where concerns are identified on the highway network Leeds City Council will review, assess and prioritise funding on a case-by-case basis.

Main issues

- 15 The Deputation request the following support from Leeds City Council: -
- a) They would like Leeds City Council to support a pilot scheme to create a well-being zone in the rural environment of Eccup.
 - b) Request clear signage with images of walkers, wheelchair users, horse riders and cyclists at the entry points to these zones, which will include the wording 'Well-Being Zone'.
 - c) Request that a 20mph speed limit to be implemented in general in these zones and signs which should be on all the beginnings of all the roads leading into the zones, with reminder signs along the way.
 - d) Request that harsher penalties be given to selfish drivers who ignore the new situation.

Findings and/or actions

- 16 **Request a). The Deputation would like Leeds City Council to support a pilot scheme to create countryside well-being zones, with the first being located in Eccup.**
- 17 Colleagues from Traffic Engineering will arrange a meeting with the Deputation representatives to discuss potential locations, current national legislation and guidance. It is worth noting here that anything outside the latter is likely to require special authorisation from DfT, which can be very data driven and a time-consuming process.
- 18 **Request b). Request clear signage with images of walkers, wheelchair users, horse riders and cyclists at the entry points to these zones, which will include the wording 'Well-Being Zone'.**
- 19 All signs which are permitted for use within the limits of the adopted highway are prescribed by the DfT and contained within the Traffic Signs Regulation and General Direction 2016 (TSRGD) publication. Any other sign which is requested and not contained within this publication would need to be formally submitted to the DfT for their special authorisation.

20 Within the TSRGD publication, a sign along the lines being suggested does exist which is associated solely with the Quiet Lane provisions and legislation. This sign is shown below. Any other variant would require DfT special authorisation.



- 21 Request c). Request that a 20mph speed limit to be implemented in general in these zones and signs which should be on all the beginnings of all the roads leading into the zones, with reminder signs along the way.**
- 22 The request to implement complementary and appropriate 20mph speed limit would have to be reviewed against current national guidance and legislation which is primarily contained within the DfT 'Setting Local Speed Limit' publication.
- 23 Request d). Request that harsher penalties be given to selfish drivers who ignore the new situation.**
- 24 Leeds City Council do not set the rules and requirements for penalties linked with driver behaviour, and the enforcement of aggressive or inappropriate driving rests with the police. However, Leeds City Council Vision Zero ambitions support challenging national criteria, and we will discuss this request with our Vision Zero partners which include West Yorkshire Police and the DfT.
- Action plan**
- 25 To note that the request to support the introduction of a 'Well-being' zone has been given careful consideration by Leeds City Council and record that in principle we support the broad concept, aims and ambitions behind the request. The next step to progress such a project will require further dialogue with the members of the Deputation and the Traffic Engineering team, and relevant Ward Members to see if a suitable location can be identified which meets the various national legislative requirements.
- 26 If a suitable location is identified and a design concept agreed, then funding consideration will be assessed via the normal annual prioritisation review processes.
- 27 The City Council through its Vision Zero safe pillar working groups will discuss the request for harsher penalties for selfish drivers and where a robust case can be developed for stronger national action this will be shared with the DfT who have the ability to make these changes.

How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing

Inclusive Growth

Zero Carbon

28 The Best City ambition is to improve life for the people of Leeds and make our city a better place. Measures to improve road safety make a specific contribution to the Best City for Communities and Child Friendly Leeds ambitions, which is future endorsed within the Vision Zero ambitions.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected:

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

Consultation and Engagement

29 A meeting with Ward members will follow once clarity around the potential location and preliminary details of a proposal are known.

Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

30 An EDCI screening has been conducted for this report. Providing easier and alternative access to the countryside via a less car dominated environment where the use of the road environment is shared with slow moving vehicles, particularly to support the use by children, older people and people with disabilities have been identified as benefits. Complimentary speed limit reductions will make the areas safer for all concerned and should encourage more healthier travel choices.

What are the resource implications?

31 At the present time there are no resource implications other than to meet with the representatives of the Deputation to explore opportunities to develop a scheme which meets their aims and ambitions, ensuring all legislative requirements have been adhered to. If a suitable location is identified and a scheme is supported, then this would have to be reviewed for funding consideration and priority at that time.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

32 There are no risks associated with reviewing the options and legislative requirements of such a well-being zone.

What are the legal implications?

33 There are no legal implications. The report is not eligible for Call-In.

Options, timescales and measuring success.

34 The Best City ambition to improve the quality of life for the people of Leeds and make our city a better place will be fully realised when residents feel safe engaging in active travel modes on all roads in Leeds. If a scheme can be developed, then this would contribute to the Vision Zero ambitions of Leeds City Council

35 In response to the Deputation the 4 requests have been carefully considered and an Action Plan has been set out in this report to further evaluate this request in conjunction with the member of this deputation.

Appendices

- Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration Screening

Background papers

- None.