



Crathes Drumoak & Durris Community Council – Living with traffic – A Different Deal

Summary

It has become clear that communities, whether Crathes, Drumoak & Durris or more widely throughout the country, are demanding a different deal with traffic. This seems to be recognised by government and there is now a movement underway to reduce speed limits through built-up areas. This isn't just about reducing and enforcing speed limits though, it is much more about appropriate speeds, which are often much lower than the limit. Speed limits are often seen and treated as targets. Communities want drivers to take care, to adopt the appropriate speed for the circumstances, to be alert to hazards, to be aware of their likely impact on those around them and to be respectful. There is a growing understanding that the communities are the priority, those on bike, on foot, in wheelchairs, dog walking and crossing roads, not the vehicles. This now needs to be embedded by palpable action. The necessary action will inevitably involve awareness campaigns and re-education as well changes to speed limits and road layouts. The Community Council has a role to play locally, making changes happen on the ground as well as playing a wider role with groups tasked with representing the interest of communities at the various levels of government.

Background

It is pretty much a fact of life that our cities, towns, villages and rural areas are connected to our road networks and in many cases our major roads go through rather than round the places we live in. So, for most of us, we must co-exist with traffic, something that we seem to be finding more difficult these days. In, Crathes, Drumoak & Durris we have noticed that we, like many communities around us and across the country it seems, are demanding change. The status quo, based on the old guidelines and standards, is no longer acceptable. In the places where we live, cycle, walk with our children and pets along the roadside, where we cross from one side of the village to the other, where path networks cross back and forth and where we are outside in our gardens, we need a different deal with traffic. This seems to be generally understood, in that more and more communities are wanting speed limits reduced and traffic calming measures increased and indeed this is happening now quite widely. So why the change in attitude? Maybe there is more focus on quality of life and less inclination to accept what has always been done, especially in terms of speed limit guidelines. Also, the vehicles themselves have changed over the decades. Cars are much quicker and, as drivers, we are insulated from the impact we have on others outside the car. There is less noise inside a modern car so we can easily listen to the sound systems or make hands-free calls while enjoying our heated seats and warm interiors. Commercial vehicles too are more powerful, larger and also have increased comfort levels. Their size, power, and noise level creates an intimidating presence which is often exacerbated by the ground shake as they pass. A car travelling at 30mph is one thing but a 40ton logging truck travelling at that speed isn't just unsafe because of the increased stopping distances, it creates additional damage to adjacent buildings. Agricultural traffic is noisy and although we think of tractors being slow, they too are more powerful and capable of speeds significantly above 30mph. Commercial and agricultural traffic often gives the impression of being in a hurry, breaking harder into a junction or limit sign and accelerating away from it creating so much more noise than is necessary.

These issues are not just limited to the passage of vehicles through villages but also on the open road. Again, many drivers seem to be less aware of their surroundings, less aware of the dangers for other road users, less courteous. Examples that regularly come to light are, not slowing down when approaching puddles or taking account of the effect of their speed on spray when travelling past pedestrians and cyclists, getting impatient with cyclists and overtaking dangerously with insufficient clearance and taking less care when passing oncoming vehicles on narrow roads. In general, too many drivers, although within the speed limit, are driving too fast with too little consideration given to their impact on those around them.



Many of us, who find the impact of vehicles passing through our communities intimidating, noisy and unsafe, are drivers ourselves, some of us commercial drivers. Many of us will, for sure, drive through other's communities in a way that we would also agree is unacceptable. Possibly for the reasons mentioned above, in that drivers are quite insulated from the impact they radiate as they drive.

So why is this happening? Is it a societal thing? Have we become more self-centred? less considerate and more impatient? Or are our cars and commercial vehicles just too fast and too comfortable? Perhaps it's both.

Sometimes, when people are approached about their speed the reaction can be, 'but I wasn't speeding'. This is a common response, and an interesting one. The implication being that if one is adhering to the speed limit then no further thought is required and the limit simply becomes a target. It also represents a sad lack of awareness about what an appropriate speed might be.

What is an appropriate speed? - There is and probably always will be a debate about appropriate speed limits. If you are trying to get from A to B in your car or truck or tractor, you will probably argue for a higher limit. The same person walking through their own village with their kids and dogs may well be feeling the limit is too high. The resulting statutory limits will be a compromise that leans towards the strongest lobby group. That's just politics. The haulage industry and possibly even motoring organisations will have a strong lobby. However, it is becoming clear that 'villagers' are becoming more vociferous for various reasons. The planning system is dropping more and more housing on top of the roads network so the size of the lobby for say 20pmh limits through villages is growing. There is a greater emphasis and awareness about quality of life and an increasing anxiety about road safety, especially on routes to schools. These days we are less tolerant about things we don't like being imposed upon us. This latter point of course cuts both ways depending on whether we are in the car or on the side of the road.

The appropriate speed is influenced by any number of factors, the road surface, the condition of your tyres, the weather and visibility, the type of vehicle and the gross weight, stopping distances, the distance from the road to walkways and the 'state' of the driver both physically and mentally. Already alluded to, is our 'attitude' when we drive. Do we care about those outside our vehicles, do we even care about the law? There is plenty of evidence that suggests that a significant number of us travel in excess of the speed limit routinely and I am sure that many of us have witnessed this along with drivers on their phones. If we are honest, there is almost no effective enforcement, so we are used to not being 'caught' so there is little incentive from that direction to comply even with existing limits let alone to make a judgement about a more appropriate speed for the circumstances and the villages through which we drive.

Our communities don't just want vehicles to comply with the speed limit, we want drivers to adopt an appropriate speed for the circumstances. This will often be much less than 30mph and take into account a wide range of factors. It is a matter of respect and a duty of care for the communities through which we drive. This is why the conversation is moving towards 20mph limits in built-up areas, something which we now seek for our communities.

So what is the solution?

Enforcing speed limits?

Speed limits are law and the police are there to enforce the law. The 30mph limit in built-up areas came into law in 1936 and enforcement has probably been an issue since that time. In reality, certainly for those that have to live with the consequences of speeding traffic, there is no effective enforcement with the possible exception of permanent speed cameras and associated fines and licence points. At present, cameras do not exist in most villages. We welcome the efforts that the police do make to check the speeds in our communities, but the reality is that these make little or no lasting difference. In the short term, without



more road traffic police, this won't change. Perhaps we need to lobby for more police and/or cameras. In the longer term technology, although it will not end people driving too fast or anti-socially, it will end people exceeding the speed limit. Limiters already exist in most cars and Sat Navs contain information about speed limits, it just remains to connect the two.

Lower speed limits?

Many villages around the UK and in Scotland now have 20mph limits within their villages either as established permanently or on a trial basis. The Scottish government is looking at introducing 20mph limits in all built up areas and this could be something introduced within a matter of 2-3 years. The only warning signs here are that it may be introduced on a case by case, street by street basis. There will be a lobby to keep the limits up on A roads. In our villages we need to be part of the lobby for 20mph limits and making the case specifically for each one.

More signs, either static or digital speed read-outs?

No one driving through our communities should be in any doubt about the speed limit. So it is vital that the signage is clear. There is often lack of clarity when limits change or when signage has been obscured by vegetation or even other signs. As a community, we can make sure the council is aware of the problems and we can continue to lobby for something more straightforward where limit changes make no sense. Most seem to agree that digital speed detection and visual read-outs do make a difference. These let a driver know that their speed has been noticed, displayed for others to see and that if they are in excess of the speed limit 😞. It is almost certainly the most effective deterrent we have. There is a case for more of these where speeding persists, which is everywhere in our villages.

Road layouts and village entrances?

The visual prompts that a driver sees when entering a village should leave them in no doubt about what is required in terms of appropriate speed, even in the absence of a limit sign. Road layouts and village entrances should push drivers out of their comfort zones if they are travelling at anything other than an appropriate speed, regardless of the limit. There is too much room in some of our villages for drivers to see the speed limit sign, but not the village. This prompts the behaviour that 'I'll slow down when I see something to slow down for' and 'when that thing is past and I can see the open road ahead, I'll speed up again'. We often observe vehicles slowing down too late and speeding up again too early. These behaviours are not just unsafe, they are anti-social, bringing more acceleration and braking noise into the village. It is crucial that we create the appropriate feeling of a village entrance and exit through road 'furniture', gateways and road markings. This isn't just about keeping vehicles within the speed limit, it is about keeping them down to an appropriate speed. That is often well below the limit especially for heavier vehicles.

Road crossings?

The Local Development Plan drives more and more housing in rural areas. Our Crathes Drumoak and Durriss community council area is no exception. All of our communities are growing in size and they all straddle roads whether they be A, B or C class roads. To a greater or lesser extent, perhaps depending on class, these roads sever those communities. Crossing backwards and forward between households, getting children to school on our walkways, walkers and cyclists on our core paths all need to be able to freely and safely cross these roads. It seems, that as a society of which government is a part, we are beginning to understand that the priority is now with people on foot, people on bikes, people in wheelchairs, people out with push-chairs, people moving about our communities, not with the road traffic. The priority is no longer with vehicles. This being the case, we now need to readdress the requirement for road crossings, road crossing that don't just indicate priority but that stop traffic such as Zebras, Pelicans, Puffins or Toucans. We need our paths through our communities on top of the roads not the other way round. These make a statement to drivers about priority and what behaviour is appropriate, one that is not open to misinterpretation. Now is perhaps the time, to once again, propose the crossings we need.



Changing driver attitude?

We aren't experts in driver behaviour or driver attitude, but most adults within our communities are drivers of one sort or another. We are ourselves car, van, truck and tractor drivers, so we do have insights as to how we drive through other communities, what we think about, what we notice and how we relate to those communities. If we are honest with ourselves we will recognise those times when we are on a mission, just trying to get from A to B, when we are irritated with traffic lights or another new stretch of 20mph, when we slow down only after we have passed a limit sign and when we speed up before a limit has ended. We know when we just want to 'crack on' and are heavy with the right foot. We are also observers of those who drive through our communities and no doubt recognise some of our own traits in them.

How often have we seen the driver hunched over the wheel, staring straight ahead, accelerating hard trying to get the days tasks done?

In contrast, there are many drivers who have slowed right down to an appropriate speed, who look relaxed and are paying attention to the road ahead and are visibly also paying attention to what is happening to their left and right, looking closely for hazards. These drivers look less urgent, less anxious and more relaxed. Those on the roadside are very likely to feel less threatened and experience less noise. Altogether a better experience.

Clearly there is an incentive in feeling more relaxed, paying more attention to what is around you, making less noise and just feeling more caring and respectful to the communities you pass through, not to mention using less fuel and creating less pollution. Driving into a village, rather than being an irritation that slows you down, could be a chance to take 3 deep breaths, to calm down, to relax a bit and pay attention to your surroundings. Just slow things up a bit, calm the beans. It's probably good for you.

What would it take to flip the former driver type into the latter? We need some clever prompts.

Technology?

Technology can, and no doubt soon will, solve part of the problem. Connecting our Sat Navs to the speed limiter will put an end to speeding. Most cars sold in the past decade have had this capability. There is an argument that says it isn't safe to limit speeds as it might interfere with the process of overtaking. Those who peddle this argument have suggested that a warning should sound instead which would only stop when the vehicle was back at the speed limit. This would solve less of the problem and accepts that we need to speed to overtake, which is illegal. This kind of technology will still not deal with 'appropriate speed' which was discussed above. Appropriate speeds will only be achieved with the appropriate driver attitude, attention and competence as well as an understanding of the impact their vehicle has on others and more compassion for the communities through which they drive. We should lobby our politicians to push these technologies.

Societal changes?

We often hear that we have become more self-centred, less caring and more angry. It is often suggested this is a by-product of a consumerist society led by social media, advertising and confrontational politics. Perhaps we spend too much time looking at our phones and not enough time looking at each other and asking ourselves the obvious question, how is my behaviour impacting on those around me? We may not be experts in driver or societal psychology but we know from what we observe that when it comes to vehicles driving through our communities, we need a 'heads up'. Initially, this 'heads up' may be in the form of clever signage but it is clear we need to take it further and raise awareness and re-educate. Something more needs to get into the DVSA syllabus.

We also need to realise that many drivers are under time pressures. Delivery drivers, for example, can be under a lot of pressure to get through their deliveries. Using a trip from Peterculter to Braemar as an example, Google tells us this is 50 miles and will take us 1hr 15mins. There are approximately 9 miles of 30mph limits between Peterculter and Braemar. 9 miles at 20mph instead of 30mph will take another 9 mins, say 12% additional journey time or 1 min additional time per mile of speed limit reduced from 30mph



to 20 mph. There will be times a vehicle cannot even do 30mph because of traffic lights, crossings and traffic parking and pulling out, so that is the absolute maximum additional time. It is almost certainly less. So, in reality we are asking less than 1 minute of a driver's time per mile of say 20mhp instead of 30mph. If drivers feel this places them under too much time pressure, then we have an issue with their employers. Again this is probably a matter of awareness and re-education and our community council can play a role in lobbying the government through those bodies who's role it is to aggregate community voices. There certainly already exists a strong haulage industry lobby as well as motoring organisations who carry counter arguments and we need to balance that.

What can a Community Council do?

- Work with the police to find new ways to enforce the limits we have.
- Start the campaign, in line with Scottish Government intention, to get 20mph speed limits in all our villages. The message doesn't seem to be getting through to shire councils.
- Push for more digital speed readouts the one measure that everyone seems to agree that works at bringing speeds down.
- Push our council to consider much more effective road layouts and village entrances so drivers know when they have crossed a line that requires them to be respectful and pay attention to being slow, quiet and careful.
- Lobby for road crossings. Road crossing are a clear statement of priority. The community has priority not the traffic.
- Join forces with others and get into the conversation that will lead to better driver awareness and education. Talk to those who design DSLA courses.
- Design some 'clever prompts' to get drivers 'heads out of their vehicles' the moment they cross that line.
- Push for the inevitable adoption of the existing technology that we already know can end speeding at the touch of a legislative button.
- Talk about the problem to raise awareness and at every opportunity do something (safe and non-confrontational) within our owns villages to raise driver awareness. If we feel for example that someone is driving too fast. Drive at 20mph when travelling through villages.
- Consider community action days to raise awareness with those driving through our villages.
- Get into the conversation with hauliers and farmers to raise awareness.
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