

Report to Helmdon Parish Council: Welsh Lane Speed Limit Proposal and Related Requests

Date: 25 June 2025

1. Introduction

This report provides a chronological overview of the process and decisions made regarding the speed limit changes on the Welsh Lane (B4525), specifically addressing why the requests from Helmdon Parish Council (HPC) for an extended 40mph speed limit and the installation of double white lines were not approved by West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) and Kier Transportation.

2. Chronology of Events

The following timeline details the key communications and actions related to the speed limit proposal:

- **15 July 2024:** Kier Transportation, acting on behalf of West Northamptonshire Council, formally proposed changes to speed limits on the Welsh Lane (Proposal No.P2037) via email consultation. Helmdon Parish Council was listed as a recipient of this statutory consultation. The proposal included:
 - Reducing the 50mph limit to 40mph on the B4525, from Manor View Farm to the Black Pits Recycling Centre, covering approximately 547 metres.
 - Reducing the National Speed Limit (60mph) to 40mph on the first 100 metres of Brackley Road and Station Road at their junction with the B4525.
 - The deadline for questions or objections was set for 5 August 2024.
- **26 September 2024:** A public notice for the speed limit proposal was advertised, allowing for public comments.
- **Late 2024 (Before Christmas/December):** Helmdon Parish Council sent a letter to WNC and the Police regarding the speed limit, which included HPC's proposed additional areas for speed reduction and a request for solid white lines. This letter was submitted because the Parish Council had not received the initial consultation notification. Helen Howard, Community Liaison Officer for Northamptonshire Highways (WNC), forwarded this to the Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) Team for consideration, unaware that the consultation had already been completed.
- **3 January 2025:** Helen Howard informed Danny Moody (HPC) that HPC's request to extend the 40mph zone had been passed to the TRO Team for their information, as they were carrying out the consultation.
- **29 January 2025:** Helen Howard advised that the consultation for the proposed limit had already been completed, and instructions had been issued for the works.
- **14 February 2025:** Danny Moody emailed Helen Howard seeking clarification regarding the consultation, as HPC was not aware it had occurred.

- **19 February 2025:** Helen Howard responded, confirming that the statutory consultation ran from 15 July 2024 to 5 August 2024, followed by a public notice on 26 September 2024. She attached the original statutory email for HPC's reference. She acknowledged the confusion stemmed from HPC's letter sent before Christmas, which she had forwarded to the TRO Team without realising the consultation was complete.
- **27 February 2025:** Kirsty Buttle (Clerk/RFO, HPC) sent a formal request to Helen Howard and Sam Simons (WNC).
 - HPC acknowledged and appreciated the approved 40mph limit but raised concerns that its length might lead to non-compliance due to drivers seeing the end of the zone.
 - HPC formally requested an additional section east on the B4525 to be reduced to 40mph, including the already approved area.
 - HPC also requested solid white lines, particularly around the crossroads, to prevent dangerous overtaking by impatient drivers on rural roads.
 - HPC suggested putting the implementation of the currently approved speed limit on hold until this additional request could be considered, to ensure cost-effectiveness.
- **18 March 2025:** Kirsty Buttle followed up on HPC's request, asking if it would be taken forward and if the approved scheme would be put on hold.
- **20 March 2025:** Helen Howard replied to Kirsty Buttle, explaining the formal speed limit review process undertaken by a panel of relevant officers, including the Community Liaison Officer, Principal Highways Engineering Officer, safety engineers, road safety practitioners, and the Safer Roads Team Leader for Northamptonshire Police.
 - She stated that the original request considered by the panel aimed to extend the 40mph limit through the crossroads out to the Falcutt junction.
 - The panel had decided against this wider extension and also against the use of double white lines.
- **18 April 2025:** Danny Moody emailed Steve Barber (Kier Transportation), who had recently retired, seeking further technical details and explanation as to why the 40mph extension and double white lines were not possible. He suggested a site meeting to discuss the issues.
- **28 April 2025:** Helen Howard responded to Danny Moody (as Steve Barber's email was forwarded to her). She reiterated the panel's position and provided further justification for the decisions regarding the speed limit extension and double white lines.
- **12 June 2025:** Danny Moody inquired about the Speed Limit Review Panel, including its meeting frequency (every two months), location (Brixworth Depot), availability of minutes (notes are usually taken but not published), and public access (not public, but councillors can attend if agreed prior).
- **14 June 2025:** Danny Moody requested a copy of the original request for the speed limit.

- **16 June 2025:** Helen Howard replied that the initial request did not come through her but was presented to the Panel by Sam Simons following meetings with councillors. She did not have a copy of the actual request.
-

3. Reasons for Not Extending the 40mph Speed Limit

The Speed Limit Review Panel considered the original request to extend the 40mph limit further, specifically to the Falcutt junction, but concluded that it was not feasible. The reasons provided by WNC/Kier Transportation for not extending the 40mph speed limit beyond the consulted-upon area are as follows:

- **Unrealistic and Potential for Non-Compliance:** The panel's consensus was that a 40mph limit covering the Falcutt junction would be "unrealistic," and "non-compliance would be widespread".
 - **Credibility and Self-Explaining Limits:** Speed limits need to be "credible and self-explaining". The proposed wider extension would "not be obvious to a careful and competent motorist why a 40mph limit was in place" and "would not reflect the look and feel of the road environment".
 - **Ineffectiveness of Signs Alone:** Merely lowering a speed limit is not sufficient to achieve conformity. "Setting limits and the installation of signs does not achieve instant compliance among road users".
 - **Illusion of Change:** If speed limits do not "command driver understanding or respect," they can "simply create an illusion of change" and are "frequently contravened," leading to "constant and insistent level of expectation from local communities for retrospective engineering interventions or enforcement activity" from police. Simply reducing the default speed limit "will merely produce an illusion of change and provide no tangible benefits for the local community".
 - **Need for Engineering Measures:** The most effective speed limits are those "backed by engineering measures," which is challenging to achieve on the rural road network.
-

4. Reasons for Not Installing Double White Lines

Helmdon Parish Council's request for solid white lines to prevent overtaking was also considered but rejected based on the following justifications:

- **Specific Design Standards and Criteria:** Double white lines are used for specific purposes, primarily to prevent overtaking where visibility is restricted, or to separate opposing traffic flows on steep hills with climbing lanes. The Traffic Authority (WNC) must ensure all markings conform to criteria set by the Department for Transport.
- **Avoiding Disrepute and Loss of Respect:** Markings must not be used where the appropriate criteria are not satisfied, as this would "bring it into disrepute and eventually lose the respect of drivers".

- **Justification and Context:** There is an emphasis on "not using double lines except where they are clearly justified," considering both the specific length and the overall route.
- **Legal Enforceability and Precedent:** Regulatory line markings must be installed and maintained to "specific design standards" to avoid "legal challenge when enforced by the police". Stepping outside these standards would "invalidate lawful enforcement". Furthermore, it "would also set a precedent whereby other communities and individuals would have raised expectations of similar measures".
- **Police Consultation:** As contravention of a prohibitory line is an endorsable offense (subject to penalty points), the appropriate Commissioner of Police or Chief Constable must be consulted whenever new double line markings are proposed.
- **Collision Data:** Analysis of collision data for the last three years along this section of the B4525 indicates that "all reported collisions... have occurred at the crossroads and none involved vehicles over taking".
- **Existing Compliance:** It is considered that "the existing road marking layout is correct for this section of the B4525" and "is compliant with the guidance we are required to follow".
- **Monitoring:** The network is continually monitored, and collision data is analysed for patterns to address through the road safety programme.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Helmdon Parish Council should continue to press WNC and Kier for the implementation of the 40mph zone as proposed and agreed. No timeline has yet been secured from WNC. It is recommended that the Parish Highways Representative writes further to Helen Howard and Sam Simons to secure a definitive implementation timetable.

Cllr Danny Moody

23 June 2025

- end -