

CHIDEOCK PARISH COUNCIL

Chideock@dorset-aptc.gov.uk

Chair: Cllr Vanessa Glenn, 6 Winniford Close, Chideock, DT6 6SA 01 297 480810

Clerk: Miss Sal Robinson, 60 North Allington, Bridport, DT6 5DY 01 308 426327

7 August 2019

Dear Sir Oliver

Re: Chideock Community Severance Report.

Chideock Parish Council writes on behalf of the residents of Chideock to raise serious and significant concerns about the outcomes from the WSP report commissioned by Highways England.

The study was completed in the autumn of 2018 and the draft proposals were shared with councillors in December 2018, with the "final" report being dated January 2019. The report identified sixteen potential outcomes, but only five of these were recommended by Highways England to be taken forward for further consideration. The majority of the measures within the report were rejected on the basis that if enacted they would impact upon the viability of the A35 being considered a strategic highway.

Examples given are the fact that if a pavement was widened or introduced then this would impact upon the width of the road. Or, for example, when considering a pedestrian crossing in the west of the village, that the impact of vehicles having to slowdown would impact directly on the flow of the traffic through the village.

The report itself failed to understand that currently villagers are being put at serious risk of harm every time they seek to cross the road (at both the eastern and western ends of the village), or when they have to step onto the carriageway where there is no safe walkway or pavement. The impact upon those with a disability and the elderly is severe. The fact that villagers have not individually raised these issues should not negate the fact that they are repeatedly raised to the Parish Council. Nor should the actual day to day living experience of villagers be ignored just because each time they cross the road they are not fatally injured.

This letter does not seek to undermine the efforts of Highways England operational officers, who have sought to work alongside the Parish Council in recent years. But it does recognise that decisions about Chideock and the A35 are being considered strategically without any reference to the continuing impact on the residents of this village. The WSP report quotes Dorset County Council as having no concerns about the speed of the traffic through Chideock - but given that the information obtained from this report was limited this cannot be conceived of as an accurate assessment of the facts.

Chideock Parish Council is seeking agreement to implement all 16 of the outcomes identified in the WSP report, on the basis that this report was supposed to be about severance and safety. The current recommendations, which still to have funding agreed, do not under any circumstances deal with all of the issues relating to severance and safety in regard to the residents of this village. In addition, the number of occupants in the village probably triples during the summer months with the many holiday makers who come to enjoy the local scenery and the beach at Seatown.

The Parish Council understands that from Highways England's perspective this matter is closed, but it is important that it is made clear that from the Parish Council's it is not. As long as the current situation continues, the Parish Council will continue to seek the improvements which were identified in the recommendations made by the consultants in the WSP report.

Finally, should a serious or fatal accident occur because of these shortcomings then villagers might feel the need to take legal action against the Department for Transport and Highways England for failing to properly address the concerns clearly identified in the WSP Report commissioned by Highways England.

Chideock Parish Council looks forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sal Robinson', with a horizontal line underneath.

Sal Robinson (Miss), Chideock Parish Clerk

Subject:Letter from Chideock Parish Council regarding WSP report option

Date: Mon, 12 Aug 2019 13:03:34 +0000

From: LETWIN, Oliver <oliver.letwin.mp@parliament.uk>

To: chideock@dorset-aptc.gov.uk <chideock@dorset-aptc.gov.uk>

Dear Sal,

Thank you for your further email of 7th August about the WSP report.

Having thought about this since our recent meeting, my conclusion is that the best way forward is for us to try to progress with Highways England the implementation of the five adopted recommendations, but then to return (once those are implemented) to the eleven other recommendations.

In that way, I think that we will stand the highest chance of getting some important things done reasonably quickly, without in any way reducing the chances of getting the other eleven things done in the longer term.

With best wishes,

Yours ever,

Oliver

RT HON SIR OLIVER LETWIN MP

Please note : My Secretary's phone number has changed to 01308 488055

<https://www.oliverletwinmp.com/data-protection-policy>

Subject:Re: Letter from Chideock Parish Council regarding WSP report option

Date: Sat, 14 Sep 2019 14:31:02 +0100

From: Chideock Parish Clerk <chideock@dorset-aptc.gov.uk>

To: LETWIN, Oliver <oliver.letwin.mp@parliament.uk>

Dear Sir Oliver

Thank you for your email of 12th August 2019 regarding the WSP Report.

I'm afraid that the Parish Council could not disagree more with your suggestion, especially taken in the light of Nick Harris' separate reply (dated 7 August 2019) effectively delaying the average speed cameras indefinitely. All the more ironic when one considers the WSP Report Option no 6 which was "Do nothing" which they discounted as they considered that highway improvements are required on the A35 at Chideock for, amongst other things "excessive vehicle speeds at the eastern end of the village".

The Parish Council is aware of much interest in the village concerning the outcome of the WSP Report, especially the introduction of average speed cameras, and for us to have to advise the village that they should expect to wait another two years (minimum) for improvements is just not acceptable. Especially when we have already been expecting these cameras for over two years, and have been waiting over 20 years for any significant improvements.

So the council hopes that you will re-consider your thoughts and add your support to our efforts in getting the findings of the WSP Report implemented urgently.

Yours

Sal Robinson

Chideock Parish Clerk

Subject:Letter from Chideock Parish Council regarding WSP report option

Date: Thu, 29 Aug 2019 09:58:05 +0000

From: LETWIN, Oliver <oliver.letwin.mp@parliament.uk>

To: chideock@dorset-aptc.gov.uk <chideock@dorset-aptc.gov.uk>

Dear Sal,

Thank you for your further email.

I am perfectly happy to make contact with Highways England again and simply seek to reinforce the Parish Council's call for the WSP report to be implemented in full immediately.

I don't think this is a wise tactic – but if it is what you want me to do, I will do it.

I attach a copy of the letter that I have written to the Chief Executive of Highways England.

With best wishes,

Yours ever,

Oliver

RT HON SIR OLIVER LETWIN MP

Jim O'Sullivan Esq
Chief Executive, Highways England
Bridge House
1 Walnut Tree Close
GUILDFORD
Surrey GU1 4LZ

Dear Mr O'Sullivan,

I am writing on behalf of Chideock Parish Council in my West Dorset constituency.

As your Dorset colleagues are very much aware, the traffic situation in Chideock has been a long-running nightmare in which your colleagues, Dorset Council (and its predecessors), the Parish Council, many residents of the Parish and I have all been involved.

As your local colleagues will also be very aware, a WSP report was recently commissioned, and this made a large number of recommendations to Highways England about measures that would improve traffic conditions in Chideock.

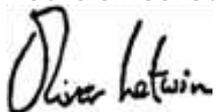
The Parish Council, acting on behalf of local residents, are extremely keen to see all of these recommendations implemented without delay, as they believe that there will be a considerable, cumulative impact on the quality of life for local residents.

It is therefore with some concern that I discovered that Highways England is not at present intending to implement the recommendations of this report in full in respect of Chideock.

I know that your colleagues locally have made huge efforts to improve conditions along the A35 in West Dorset. But they clearly cannot carry through the recommendations of this report without support and approval from Highways England headquarters.

I am accordingly writing to you in the hope that you will review the position currently taken by Highways England on the implementation of this report, and that you will take steps to enable it to be implemented in full without further delay.

Yours sincerely,



SIR OLIVER LETWIN



Our ref: CEO 19191393

Rt Hon Sir Oliver Letwin MP

letwino@parliament.uk

Nick Harris
Operations Executive Director
Bridge House
Walnut Tree Close
Guildford
Surrey
GU1 4LZ

nick.harris@highwaysengland.co.uk

19 September 2019

Dear Sir Oliver

A35 Chideock

Thank you for your letter of 29 August 2019 to Jim O'Sullivan, on behalf of Chideock Parish Council, regarding traffic in Chideock. I am responding to you as this issue falls within my area of responsibility.

I have attached an electronic copy of the study for Chideock with this reply for your information. There was a total of sixteen options identified, five of which could be taken forward for consideration. Paragraph 6.7 on page 35 within the study sets out these options and why they were discounted.

We have not rejected any of the five options recommended for further consideration at this stage. We expect to look in more detail at these five options starting in April 2020, subject to funding.

Our Route Manager, Andy Roberts, met with the Parish Council in May this year. Andy gave a presentation on the attached study and provided an outline of the expected next phase of the work.

There is another meeting with the Parish Council arranged for 20 September and with yourself at the A35 Working Group on 27 September. Andy will be happy to discuss any aspect of the issues raised at these coming meetings.



If you would like any further information Andy will be pleased to respond. He can be contacted by email at andy.roberts@highwaysengland.co.uk or by telephone on 0300 470 4704. Alternatively, our correspondence address is Ash House, Falcon Road, Exeter, EX2 7LB.

Yours sincerely



Nick Harris
Operations Executive Director

www.highwaysengland.co.uk

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Chair: Cllr Vanessa Glenn, 6 Winniford Close, Chideock, DT6 6SA 01 297 480810

Clerk: Miss Sal Robinson, 60 North Allington, Bridport, DT6 5DY 01 308 426327

11 October 2019

Re: Implementation of WSP Options for Chideock, Dorset.

Dear Mr Harris

The Parish Council is aware of the letter sent to you by Sir Oliver Letwin on its behalf dated 29th August 2019 and have been copied on your reply to him dated 19th September 2019.

Unfortunately, the Parish Council considers that your response indicates a lack of comprehension from you of the seriousness with which it takes the well-being of our villagers and visitors. Councillors therefore feel that a direct letter may emphasise the significant concerns felt about the outcomes from the WSP report which HE commissioned to review Chideock Community Severance and Pedestrian Safety. Councillors are very familiar with the WSP Report, it has been published on our website and Andy Roberts held a meeting with councillors in May 2019 to specifically discuss the options which HE intends to consider further for delivery. The council is also very familiar with the problems associated with the A35 through Chideock, and please remember that, although the WSP Report has formally recognised these issues only since January 2019, residents have lived with them for many many years.

Firstly, it is necessary to clarify the comment in your letter about the number of these options that you intend taking forward since you specify 5 of these could be taken forward for consideration. To be clear you are considering delivering on only 4 of these since 2 options (the additional pedestrian crossing at the Eastern end of the village) is either in location 1 or location 2. Councillors notice from your letter dated 7 August 2019 that another of these 4 options (the provision of average speed cameras) is now unlikely since you have prioritised further studies of safety on the A35 through Dorset between Charmouth Roundabout and the Tolpuddle By-pass. Even when works receive your budgetary acceptance the period before actual implementation of the works is frustratingly slow, with an expectancy of 4 - 5 years at best.

The Parish Council is very pleased that you intend taking forward for consideration some of the options identified in the Report, but find it hard to understand that whilst your own Consultant has identified an additional 10 problems (and these are, of course, only related to safety and severance) you have found reasons to discount all of these. Surely this must lay HE open to culpability in the unfortunate event of an accident occurring as a result of one or more of these identified options having been ignored.

Indeed, when one examines the reasons given for ignoring these additional 10 options, they appear to weigh very heavily on the side of your budgetary controls rather than the safety and well-being of residents and visitors. For instance, the improved provision of footways on the south side of the A35 (Option 7); the excessive cross fall issues on sections of the northern footway (Option 16) and the steep exit ramp from the emergency exit from the Village Hall (WSP Report ref. 4.4.2). The council has already written to you (dated 26 August 2019) concerning these relative to your responsibilities under the 2010 Equalities Act but emphasise again here that these pavements and the Village Hall exit are dangerous and totally unacceptable to the disadvantaged members of our society. It seems that whereas as a nation we are making every effort to "advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it" HE is continuing to keep these people within the shackles of their disadvantages.

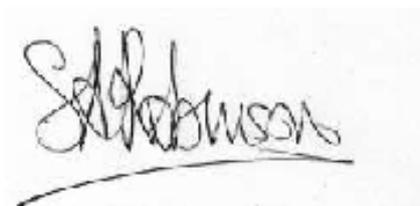
Further options that you dismiss are those concerning the total absence of a pedestrian footway on large stretches of the south side of the A35 (Options 7, 8 and 12). Again here councillors find it unbelievable that, having identified a problem that this village has lived with for 50+ years, and during a period of ever increasing traffic volumes, that you can ignore them so readily under the guise of "land acquisition" (Options 7 & 8) or "not being included in the DMRB" in the case of the provision of a "virtual footway" (Option 12). All the more strange since "virtual foot-ways" are already commonplace in the village. These excuses seem pretty shallow to the pedestrians literally taking their lives in their hands as they walk within inches of 40T juggernauts legally travelling at 30mph along that very road. Perhaps these "reasons for discounting" options may seem a little less protective in the event that one of these vehicles fatally or seriously injures a mother with child in push-chair that had been (quite legally) walking along this stretch of pavement-less highway for access to a property which itself has no pedestrian pavement in front of it.

In the course of writing this letter the Parish Council has received your letter dated 04 October 2019) specifically concerning the adverse pavement camber and thanks you for comments about this issue and for your commitment to explore further the potential for improvements to the footway cross-falls. However the council must reiterate it's concerns that the adverse cambers, together with the steep exit ramp from the Village Hall and the total absence of any footpath for stretches of the road all present serious and present dangers to all villagers and visitors alike, but especially to the disadvantaged members of our society. The Parish Council still considers that these issues in particular do not currently meet your duty of care under the Equalities Act and sincerely hope that you will reconsider all of these issues and find the means to carry out the "reasonable adjustments" to which you refer.

Whilst councillors fully appreciate the efforts made by your local team in the form of Andy Roberts and Emma Bazeley it is felt that HE's business model is based upon ever increasing traffic volumes along the A35 and really does not appreciate the human suffering being imposed upon our village. To this end the Parish Council invites you to come to Chideock to meet councillors and to see for yourself the totally unacceptable conditions this road puts upon the village, and thereby (maybe) convince you to re-consider some of the identified options that you earlier discounted.

I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sal Robinson', written over a horizontal line.

Sal Robinson (Miss), Chideock Parish Clerk

CC Councillor Ray Bryan, Dorset Councillor for Travel and Environment
Sir Oliver Letwin MP
Councillor Christopher, Marshwood Vale Ward
Mr Jim O'Sullivan, Highways England CEO