

Draft - Traffic Issues & Possible Solutions on Church Hill & Dark Lane



Purpose

To identify and explore what options might best be taken forward to seek to resolve the traffic movement of HGVs and other unsuitable vehicles along Church Hill and Dark Lane. Both these roads are narrow public highways. Responsibility for them rests with the Local Authority Bath and North East Somerset Council.

Issues

- There are various sections of these roads which are narrow - not much more than a width of 7 foot in places. Further, the structures of some of the local properties are liable to damage by high sided vehicles.
- Private driveways are used by vehicles who have got themselves stuck, in attempts to then turn round.
- Private property has been damaged - walls, guttering and roof tiles.
- Cars park on the pavement down Church Hill and along the lower section of Dark Lane.
- The existing signage is inconsistent and confusing.
- SatNav - some Apps continue to indicate that Church Hill and Dark Lane are suitable routes through the village.

The majority of traffic issues arise from vehicles accessing these roads via The Hill or the top end of the High Street and then proceeding down Church Hill to emerge either at the school junction or at the top of Dark Lane by Crowe Lane.

The traffic flow is slight but when unsuitable vehicles use these local roads they have a disproportionate effect in that the incidence of damage to property is extremely high. If an HGV vehicle or similar proceeds down Church Hill and gets stuck at one of the pinch points then the opportunities to turn round are either limited or non-existent and in either event are likely to cause damage to properties fronting the road.

At the present time local residents are making increased use of home deliveries for shopping, goods and services. We do not want to make life more difficult for residents but rather to come up with solutions which seek to strike a reasonable balance between the needs of residents while lessening their concerns over the use of the roads by through traffic.

We should seek to avoid potential solutions which may just move the problem to another section of the roads through the village.

Signage



Church Hill

You will see that additional signs have been placed by B&NES in the course of the last 12 months - a width restriction sign and a Local Access sign. The width sign is of doubtful legality - it does not comply with current legislation, the Local Access sign is advisory only but if well placed it could be effective. Inexplicably this work was carried out without Notice being given to the PC by the Highway Authority. Despite the placement of these signs the PC has received information that they have not had the desired effect in preventing unsuitable vehicles from proceeding down Church Hill. Any motorist might reasonably claim that the signs are misleading and do not make clear to which routes the restrictions apply.

If the telephone box and waste bin were removed from this site there may be an opportunity to reconfigure the junction to show more clearly that the main route through the village is along the High Street and that Church Hill is for local access only and is subject to a width restriction. At the same time it should be possible to make clearer the signage - this could include a roadmarking 'arrow' indicating the main route sweeping left through the village .

It would be more effective if any road restriction signs were placed closer to the Church Hill junction but it is not immediately obvious as to where they could be placed other than on private property.

If anything is done it needs to take account both of the drive access to the Manor and to ensure that vehicular access to St Peters Church remains generous and unimpeded to ensure that wedding and funeral services - limousines and hearses alike, can proceed as usual.

Dark Lane/ High Street Junction



There is no signage at this point to indicate that there are width restrictions on Dark Lane or Church Hill.

Note the parked cars - quite often cars are parked closer to the junction and it is a 'squeeze' to get through. In its favour one might reasonably claim that visibility ahead is good and that any driver of an HGV or similar can see immediately that the road ahead is narrow and unsuitable for HGVs.

In the past considerable damage was caused to the wall of Greyhound Cottage by an HGV (by the green garage on the right hand side). The vehicle had come from the Church Hill direction.



Dark Lane (top)

The top photograph shows no apparent road signs at the Dark Lane junction other than the white lines indicating that the main road is down New Road. But some 50 metres up the road is this sign (see lower photo) which shows a width restriction - an apparent reference to Dark Lane together with a meaningless 'Except for Loading' sign.



Further down New Road heading towards the school are these signs:

I include this as it indicates not only that there is a school ahead but that the main road carries straight on. It does not show that a left turn at the junction will take you to a road where there is a width restriction.

On the right hand side further down the road is another pointless sign saying 'Hump 80 yards'. There are three 'hump' signs on each road approaching the High Street/ Freshford Lane junction and they were installed by B&NES when the lay out of the junction was improved some 6 years ago.

Options

There are a range of options which can be considered to help ease the present difficulties. They include:

- Stopping up the highway/no entry signs
- Changing or improving the road lay out
- Improved signage and placement (including width, height & access restriction signs)
- Parking restrictions
- Road markings
- Remove roads from SatNav directions
- Central delivery point for the village

Stopping up* the highway/no entry signs: To stop up roads or to turn the roads into 'one way' systems or cul de sacs would not only be a lengthy, contentious and costly process but would likely be detrimental to the interests of many local residents. Equally the PC stance over the years has been to recognise the village highways as roads where traffic can move freely in both directions. Inevitably there are incidents from time to time when vehicles cause damage to property or get stuck but never has there been expressed by a majority of local residents the view that the fundamental nature of the local roads be changed.

Some of the signage options would require local legislation to be passed to ensure conformity with the Road Traffic Regulations - stopping up, No Entry etc.

The process requires also that there be public consultation before final determination by Bath and North East Somerset Council.

**'stopping up' means that the highway land ceases to be a highway, ie the highway rights are extinguished in law and the land is free of any Highway Authority control.*

Improved road layout: Equally changes to the road lay out can be very costly. The work done to improve the kerb and pavement on The Hill was costed at some £25,000 - all costings take account not only of the cost of the actual road works but also the cost of B&NES engineer and surveyor's time etc. in drawing up the proposals. The High Street Junction improvements were costed at some £60,000.

Improved signage: Good signage on the other hand may be positioned quickly and at relatively low cost. Most of the signage is Advisory Only and while it cannot be enforced by police, traffic warden or by court proceedings that does not mean it cannot be effective. Despite the plethora of enforceable road signs placed throughout the village the PC knows of no instances of motorists being prosecuted for road traffic offences committed on the village roads and this has been the reality for over 20 years or so - maybe even longer. Some current signage, including width & access restriction signs, are felt to be poorly placed.

Parking restrictions: Parking restrictions on Church Hill and Dark Lane might improve road access but would, we think, be resisted by local residents. Given the limited spaces available for parking on the village roads any restrictions would only place an additional

burden on the main through routes and other side roads. For these reasons the PC takes the view that this option should not be taken forward.

Changes to road markings: Road markings at Church Hill could be improved to reduce the number of vehicles mistakenly using Church Hill as the village through route.

Removal from Sat Navs: BANES Highways Department were asked in 2018 to look into whether Dark Lane & Church Hill could be removed from route options given by Sat Nav systems, by indicating that the roads were unsuitable for HGVs. The outcome of this will be investigated. It's felt that this is worth looking into again, but it's noted that maps on phones (Google maps etc) are used as much as Sat Navs so even if changes on some systems are possible, some mapping apps may still direct drivers down unsuitable lanes.

Central delivery point for the village: The use of Home Delivery services has increased considerably in recent years and particularly so in these present times. Even if life 'returns to normal' it is unlikely to reverse the general trend towards the use of home delivery and in any event it is seen by many as a more economic and 'greener' option than travelling to shop by using private vehicles. There may be opportunity for goods to be delivered to a village centre point for onward collection but at this point in time it is aspirational only and would need further study to determine whether it was either desirable or practical.

Conclusions

While there has been no traffic count to determine the number and nature of vehicle movements on Church Hill and Dark Lane the PC accept that it is probable that the clear majority of incidents arise from vehicles accessing the two local roads from the High Street/ Church Hill junction by the Church.

On that basis it would make sense to concentrate on seeking to resolve the current problems by improvements at this road junction.

The simplest option will be to place 'restrictive' road signs in appropriate locations at this point where they can be seen easily and understood readily. We do not think that the three signs mounted on the same poles and sited below the defunct telephone box are effective in that position. The Width Restriction sign and Local Access sign could be more effective if better placed. We think that Advisory signs can be just as effective as RT Regulation Order signs.

If the road markings were also improved this might reduce the number of vehicles mistakenly using Church Hill as the village through route.

If this work is done the PC would also wish to see appropriate and similar signage placed at the top and bottom of Dark Lane. We would hope that any signage could be clear, well placed, discrete and in scale with its surroundings.

In 2018 the PC submitted to the Highways Department the request that Church Hill and Dark Lane be added to the list of roads deemed unsuitable for HGVs. We ask for confirmation that this request was actioned.

We believe that the junction lay out could be improved in a way that would better indicate that Church Hill is a local road not suitable for through traffic and/or HGVs. This though would require considerable planning and costings were it to be taken forward. For now we suggest offering it for consideration while recognising the limitations on taking it forward.

Recommendation

That the PC accept the conclusions and agree that the PC now submit this Report to the Highway Authority for its consideration.

NJS
19/1/21.