

Traffic calming and 20mph speed limits in villages

This information was supplied by the road safety charity Brake.

The UK's 2016 National Survey showed that on average 5 or more children and 20 or more adults were killed or seriously injured whilst walking, running or cycling every day. Speed is a critical factor in all road accidents. 69% of all responders were in favour of introducing a 20mph speed limit in residential or built-up areas together with some form of traffic calming.

Towns, villages and cities should all be places where people are free to travel in ways that are safe and sustainable. Unfortunately, in many places in the UK inappropriate speed limits make things more dangerous, particularly for children and the elderly.

Faster speeds and the lack of safe footpaths or cycle routes not only makes a community less safe, it also affects people's perceptions of danger, and this can be a determining factor in getting people to go out walking, running or cycling.

Traffic speed counts often show that many drivers break speed limits in villages as well as built-up areas. A Brake and Direct Line survey revealed that 40% of drivers break the 30mph speed limits by at least 10mph.

It is acknowledged by the World Health Organisation that 20mph is the most appropriate maximum speed limit for areas where people live, work and play. It is even more important in areas where all types of traffic mix with pedestrians, runners and cyclists.

Research has found that children cannot judge the speed of approaching vehicles travelling faster than 20mph, so may believe it is safe to cross when it is not.

A limit of 20mph gives drivers a greater chance to stop in time for a child.

Research has shown that the right type of physical traffic calming measures can reduce speeds by around 10mph. Flashing vehicle-activated signs can reduce speeds by an additional 4mph. Timed traffic lights at each end of a village can slow the speed of vehicles considerably as they enter a built-up area.

When implementing a speed reduction, local councils must decide between implementing a 20mph zone or a 20mph limit. For example, a 20mph zone is an area of road with repeater signs and physical traffic calming measures, including road narrowing. A 20mph limit is an area marked by 20mph repeater signs, with no physical traffic calming measures in place.

Unfortunately, with local authority budgets under severe pressure, many councils now view the cost of introducing traffic calming and 20mph limits as prohibitive, and treat it as a low to medium priority.