

SANDWICH – TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORT ISSUES

Introduction

The starting point for this paper is the STARR Traffic Management Survey. This identified all the main traffic and transport issues which exercise residents and businesses in Sandwich. Essentially, these are (not necessarily in descending order of strength of public feeling)

- Heavy vehicle traffic into and through the town centre
- Speeding
- Double decker buses
- Parking for tourist coaches
- Parking
- Pedestrianisation of parts of the town centre

Despite the introduction of measures flowing from the STARR survey, notably the PACE traffic speed restriction and the pedestrianisation of King Street on Saturday mornings, traffic in the town centre remains problematic and the subject of unabating public angst.

The purpose of this paper is to propose short and medium term actions addressing these problems. It does not attempt to sketch a holistic “vision” of a future for Sandwich as a quaint, traffic free museum/tourist attraction. This would undoubtedly encounter strong opposition from the business community. Rather, it envisages Sandwich as remaining essentially what it is today - a “living” historic town, combining an extraordinary historic, architectural heritage with its role as a vibrant small market town – only more so. This requires balance, and compromises.

The philosophy behind the paper is that the situation calls for a set of relatively minor, interlinked, incremental improvements which can be introduced relatively easily; and, recognising the reality of budgetary constraints on Councils, without an unrealistic price tag. We should avoid falling into the trap of letting the best be the enemy of the good. Furthermore, while it would be wonderful to introduce all the short term measures at once, they could actually be implemented in a rolling programme, as and when resources permit, concentrating on the highest priorities first.

A comprehensive public consultation was conducted for the STARR Traffic Management Survey in 2006. This provides useful insights into public attitudes, especially as between residents and local businesses, and pointers as to proposals which merited further consideration and consultation. We should aim to introduce measures on which there is general consensus amongst residents, deferring for further consultation action on contentious points on which the Survey revealed clear disagreement between residents and the business community.

Dover District Local Development Framework – Core Strategy 2010

We have taken full account of this fundamentally important document in adumbrating our proposals. This imposes certain constraints, but also provides ammunition for lobbying DDC and other county agencies for support, political and financial, for what we want to do. There are four particular aspects which are relevant to our proposals –

- protection of Sandwich’s historic centre,

- the opportunity to develop tourism
- the need to revive Sandwich's commercial role as a Rural Service Centre
- the need to bring down the average age of the population by attracting more working age people and families to the District. Proposals for new housing development in and around Sandwich (which of course have implications for traffic) have this very much in mind. This also points to the need to create a more family friendly environment in the town centre in terms of safer pavements, etc.

The Framework makes frequent, explicit reference to Sandwich's priceless **historic heritage** ("exceptional concentration of historic assets"), and the need to protect it. It correctly observes that Sandwich centre has "a remarkably intact medieval street pattern and built form. Although this poses constraints, it is above all a major asset to be protected". This is clearly especially relevant to the problem of the stress and damage caused by large trucks and big buses.

It places emphasis on the desirability of promoting the **under-developed tourism sector** in Sandwich. It notes that the combination of Sandwich's historic importance, and international and national golf, offers an opportunity for an increased contribution to the tourist economy of the district. It explicitly recognises the need to resolve problems involving tourist coaches by improving coach parking facilities, as well as improved and enhanced car parking arrangements for both tourists and residents, which are currently at saturation point and beyond.

The Strategy places major priority on the need to **reverse the decline in the commercial fortunes** of the region. Sandwich is ranked 30th in Kent in terms of turnover in shopping and leisure; the town is underperforming in this respect. It notes that town centre shops are showing signs of stress due to reducing levels of trade, though the centre remains well thought of by residents. One of the messages which comes through loud and clear from eg the STARR Survey is the damage **which car parking charges**, by deterring shoppers from the neighbourhood, have caused to the volume of trade in the town. This is a major complaint by local traders.

In terms of **quality of life**, one of the objectives of the Framework Strategy is to reduce the need for vehicular traffic by encouraging walking, cycling and public transport within the town, and between the town and the outlying villages, through the provision of new facilities. Present infrastructure and street architecture is severely deficient in this respect.

Against this background, a number of possible initiatives are proposed:

Heavy Vehicles

The continuing damage by heavy vehicles to the historic fabric of the town, and the potential hazard which they pose to pedestrians, are clearly unacceptable. As noted above, they are incompatible with the emphasis placed in the Dover Development Strategy on protecting the outstanding historic nature of the town.

There is, however, a difference between very large trucks passing through Sandwich, inadvertently or not, and the smaller trucks which are used to supply local retail outlets. So, while there should be a strong crack-down on very large trucks using Sandwich as a rat-run, or entering Sandwich due to misleading satnavs, we need to be mindful of the commercial traders in Sandwich and the strategic objective of encouraging Sandwich's role as a living town (Rural Service Centre) as well as a museum

showcase. Proposals therefore need to be balanced, realistic, and to have the support of the local business community.

Short term Action

- A lorry watch programme (in hand) to assess the scale of the problem, particularly through traffic. Public awareness of this might incidentally have at least the short-term effect of deterring miscreants.
- Much more visible and effective size and weight restriction signs on the approaches to Sandwich, including length, weight and height restrictions. These might need to be accompanied by or sited near potential turning places.
- Enter into discussion with local retail outlets (Coop, Spar) about using smaller lorries for local deliveries, recognising that smaller lorries would mean more lorries entering Sandwich each day. Alternatively, strict agreed limits on access points and time windows.

Medium/Long Term Aim

- A complete ban on all heavy and long vehicles entering the town centre. This would necessitate physical restrictions on the approaches to the town, proper enforcement, publicity, satnav alerts, etc
- Introduction of a ban on delivery trucks entering the town centre between 10 and 5. This would necessitate further consultation, particularly with the local business community. A measure of this sort would not solve the intrinsic problem, nor would it provide the ideal separation between lorries and eg school children in the morning rush hour.

Tourist Coaches

As noted above, the provision of a proper coach park for Sandwich is recognised by the Dover Development Framework as representing a high priority in the development of Sandwich's tourist potential. Dover should now be pressed hard to "put their money where their mouth is". An obvious site for such a coach park would be the KCC depot behind the Fire Station (assuming that it has not already been disposed of or earmarked by DDC for sale). Alternatively, or in addition, a site should be identified and acquired off the approach road on the far side of the river, so that coaches would no longer need to cross into the town at all (but see next paragraph).

Without a dedicated new coach park, there are no obvious quick fixes which do not have significant downsides. An outright ban on coaches entering the centre of town from any direction would undoubtedly attract opposition from the operators as well as the commercial community in the town; and in any case, the lack of parking and turning places outside the centre of town makes this impractical.

The least worst temporary solution would therefore seem to be to require coaches to enter the town by the Toll Bridge, drop their passengers and recross the Toll Bridge to park by the side of the road to Discovery Park, or further out. In that case, coach parking bays should be painted by the side of the road at an appropriate location.

Buses

Given the importance which the Dover Development Strategy attaches to encouraging use of public transport (as well as walking and cycling), and the social importance of public transport provision, there is no question of trying to reroute or ban buses from the centre of Sandwich. Nor does there seem to be any sensible alternative to the Guildhall as the main bus stop in town.

However, large double decker and very long single decker buses are clearly too bulky for the width of the streets in the town centre, and pose a danger to pedestrians, particularly on the Toll Bridge and when the buses are going round tight corners, as well as to historic buildings overhanging the road. Moreover, some of the buses currently in use are old and polluting. Discussion should therefore be initiated with the bus companies to encourage them to introduce smaller, more modern, cleaner buses on routes through Sandwich.

Longer term, a review of routes and bus stops will be required in conjunction with plans for new housing and retail outlet development in the south west part of Sandwich, and in the Discovery Park development.

Parking

There are two basic issues – the **inadequacy of parking provision in Sandwich, and car parking charges.**

If Sandwich's development is not to be held back, **additional car parking** will have to be provided, especially once further residential and retail development plans are realised. This is in addition to, or could be in conjunction with, new parking facilities for coaches, as noted above. Possible sites should be identified on the outskirts of Sandwich, before discussion is initiated with DDC about planning and financial aspects.

Cow Leas Meadow has been previously identified by the STARR Traffic Management Survey as a possible site for a new car park, with the caveat that this option apparently did not enjoy popular support. Other possibilities might include land opposite or within the industrial estate in Stonar, or perhaps the land earmarked for a possible retail outlet in southwest Sandwich opposite St Bart's.

Meanwhile, the STARR Survey revealed strong dissatisfaction, especially on the part of the business community, with the level of **car parking charges**. Anecdotal evidence indicates that trading levels fell off steeply following their introduction, and, combined with the loss of trade to Westwood Cross and other shopping centres, have not recovered. Certainly the present arrangements appear inconsistent with the Dover Development Framework's support for revivifying Sandwich as a rural shopping hub for the district. DDC should therefore be pressed again about relaxing car parking charges and/or introducing a palliative (one attractive suggestion emerging in the STARR consultation was a "take and display" parking ticket providing 3 hours of free parking).

Some other minor but useful short term improvements need to be introduced, including

- different arrangements for disabled cars
- road markings introduced to prohibit parking for disabled drivers in highly constrained roads like No Name Street and New Street/main Bus Stop opposite the Guild Hall, where parking on double yellow line can cause danger and traffic jams.

Speeding

This remains a cause of significant discontent on the part of residents, particularly those living along the roads most affected, and a potential safety hazard. It can only be a matter of time before a speeding vehicle causes a serious accident. The introduction of a 20mph speed restriction has undoubtedly had some effect; and the recent installation of a flashing 20mph sign on High Street was welcome. But numerous drivers, not just "boy racers" and white vans, still blatantly flout the restriction. There is little point in having a 20mph zone if it is not enforced.

A very intermittent police presence with speed cameras, however welcome, is clearly not proving a deterrent. In any case, prosecutions for exceeding the 20mph limit are known to be rare; and Government doctrine on 20mph speed limit zones is that they should be "self-enforcing". It is not clear that appeals to businesses and the bus companies to compel their drivers to stay within the speed limit would be effective, though this should not be excluded. In the final analysis, only physical measures are likely to be effective.

Various different remedies have been postulated for Sandwich

- speed bumps (no doubt objections will be expressed by the bus companies. But they seem to cope perfectly well with speed bumps in other communities. We recognise that these may pose potential structural problems in certain parts of the town; these would need to be assessed by structural engineers)
- traffic cameras (surely these could be combined with the flashing speed warning signs)
- chicanes or creation of strategically placed parking bays to slow traffic down (as in Littlebourne), or
- pedestrian crossings, which would also help the elderly and mothers with push chairs. The objection about siting such crossings close to junctions is not supported by evidence elsewhere.

All have advantages and disadvantages. Some would be effective in one setting; others in another. A combination of these measures can be observed in a number of other towns and villages around Kent, as well as in London, where they seem to work well. There should therefore be no philosophical, practical, or aesthetic, objection to trying them in Sandwich. In our view, serious and urgent steps should now be taken to address the problem, if only along the streets in the one way system. High Street is a particularly notorious speed track. We recommend a systematic study leading to early action.

Pedestrianisation

To judge by the STARR survey, the only one of 4 different propositions which attracted majority support amongst both residents and local businesses is for some form of "pedestrian priority" scheme in the central area of the town. The King Street Saturday morning experiment is clearly a success, and has demonstrated to sceptics in the business community that such schemes need not be damaging to trade. An extension of the scheme to Market Street would be a logical next step. But, as with King Street, a total, permanent, ban on vehicles would probably prove contentious. Unless introduced in conjunction with other measures, it would also have an unwelcome knock-on effect by increasing the volume of traffic along Strand Street and High Street.

Any significant extension of pedestrian priority in Sandwich is therefore something for the longer term. It would certainly necessitate further consultation, especially with local traders, and would need to be part of a more radical new traffic regime, as well as corresponding improvements in parking facilities in and around the town centre.

In the meantime, there would be a case for

- experimenting with extending the Saturday morning ban in King Street to Market Street, or
- slightly more radically, introducing a ban on vehicles entering Market Street between 10 and 5 Monday to Saturday, with exceptions for eg Blue Badge drivers.

Conclusion

To recapitulate, any radical re-configuring of traffic in Sandwich should form part of the planning process associated with the construction of new housing and retail outlets in the Discovery Park and southwest parts of the town. These will present major infrastructural challenges if Sandwich is not to be overwhelmed by traffic.

This does not, however, preclude agreement on a set of palliatives which could and should be adopted in the short term. Together, these would reduce the risk to the historic fabric of the town, reduce the hazard to pedestrians, and enhance the beauty of the town and the quality of life of its residents, without detracting from its commercial vitality – indeed, if parking charges could be revised, this alone would probably do more than anything else to boost trade.

Summary of “quick fixes”

Lorries

- Lorry watch exercise with associated publicity
- Improved signage about weight/length/height restrictions on approaches to Sandwich
- Discussion with local retailers about using smaller lorries/voluntary access limitations

Coaches

- New temporary parking bays on other side of Toll Bridge/Discovery Park road/ by Richborough turn-off/by St Barts

Buses

- Urge bus companies to phase out double deckers/old and polluting buses
- Urge bus companies to ensure drivers comply with speed limits

Parking

- Press DDC to reduce parking charges/introduce 3 hour “take and display” ticket system in car parks
- Increase provision of Blue Badge parking
- Prohibition on Blue Badge parking in No Name Street/opposite Guildhall

Speeding

- Increased police presence/monitoring/enforcement
- Urgent feasibility study of speed bumps/chicanes/traffic cameras/pedestrian crossings/revised parking arrangements to slow traffic down

Pedestrianisation

- Extend Sat am ban on cars to Market Street on experimental basis as precursor to possible
- Mon-Sat 10-5 ban on vehicles in Market Street

RPR

25/06/14

Sandwich Town – KCC Highways Report

On Friday 3rd October Ryan Shiel from Kent County Council (KCC) Highways and Transportation met with the Sandwich Town Team to discuss the various highway concerns that have been raised by local residents and carry out a detailed walk through around the town. Whilst on site comprehensive observations were made at various locations and recommendations put forward about how to alleviate highway safety issues in each location, these were then discussed in full with the working group.

Main issues and targets:

Various overarching issues seemed to have a knock on effect to many of the smaller highway enquiries. The main aim of the Sandwich Town Team and the proposals outlined in this report are to reduce the amount of *rat running* through the town, stop heavy goods vehicles (HGV's) and larger vehicles from using the town as a through route, and rationalise the size / number of buses.

Proposal 1 – Refresh existing markings in High Street around the Toll Bridge, and on approaches

The High Street and area in front of the toll bridge is one of the busiest areas in Sandwich. There are several different traffic movements taking place here as the point where various roads meet, including Strand Street and Ramsgate Road. The existing markings are needed to ensure that drivers and pedestrians are aware of how this space should be used; these markings do fade over time due to the amount of traffic in this area. The Highway Operations Team at KCC have been contacted to request that the white markings around Strand Street / High Street and the busy junction be refreshed. This will ensure that all who use this area will know where they need to be to ensure its safe use. This is not deemed to have any negative impacts as it is simply maintaining what is already in place.



Proposal 2 – Improvements to existing weight limit signage on all entry points into Sandwich

Drivers of larger vehicles frequently travel through Sandwich, usually because they are directed to do so by Satellite Navigation devices which have not been updated or are unsuitable for larger vehicles. This is a national issue and suitable restrictions are being explored. However, to help advise

drivers accordingly the Town Team have asked if the existing weight limit signs and other HGV signage could be improved, or enlarged to ensure that it is clear and visible on all approaches into the town. This would include introduction of signage on junctions / roundabout approaches to Sandwich, such as at the Deal Road / Dover Road, at points where drivers can safely turn to use correct routes.



Positive effects:

- Could help to reduce the number of larger vehicles entering Sandwich, and encourage drivers to use the by-pass.

Negative impacts:

- Will increase sign clutter in the area.
- Effect could be minimal, as drivers may continue to follow satellite navigation devices.
- To be truly effective the scheme may require physical measures, but any narrowing's or barriers would be prohibitive to bus services.

Detailed design and investigation costs: £1,500 to assess signs on all four approaches and identify new sign designs, sizes and post requirements.

Potential scheme cost dependant on outcome of detailed design: Ranging from £500 to £4,000 per site dependant on the size of the signs required and the traffic management requirements to carry out the works.

Proposal 3 – The introduction of a system of raised tables / humps

Vehicle speeds have been reported by many residents as a major safety issue, along with the large volumes of traffic travelling through the town without stopping, or any purpose for coming into Sandwich.

Due to the historic nature of Sandwich it was agreed that many forms of traffic calming and road features would not be suitable or in keeping with the area. However, it was outlined that raised table features could be installed without causing too much visual obtrusion and still provide a traffic calming feature and enhanced pedestrian crossing provision. Raised tables have been used in other conservation areas and can be constructed from heritage materials. To be legally and safely installed at least two traffic calming features are required in a road to ensure that a system is in place, and

not an isolated table or hump. With this in mind two sites were located in each of the main roads forming the one way system in Sandwich. The individual sites and reasons for their selection have been detailed below:

Site 1 Strand Street, junction with Pillory gate:



A raised table in this location would provide a crossing point to the river front footpath, and help slow driver speeds at the point where the footway narrows.

Site 2 Strand Street, outside number 8:



Proposed measures in this vicinity could help reduce driver speeds on approach to the High Street junction.

Site 3 High Street, near Carole Ridley and pedestrian walkway:



A raised table in this location would provide a crossing point to the town centre footpath.

Site 4 High Street, outside no.47 Wallis House:



Drivers often increase their speed once they pass the row of on street parking in this part of the High Street. A traffic calming feature at this point will advise drivers to keep their speeds low.

Site 5 New Street, opposite the Ropewalk:



A raised table in this location would provide a crossing point to The Rope Walk and Mill Wall footpaths.

Site 6 New Street, outside number 64:



By installing a traffic calming feature at this point, it could discourage drivers from travelling at excessive speeds on the straight approach to the zebra crossing.

Site 7 Moat Sole, opposite the Mill Wall:



A raised table in this location would provide a crossing point to the Ropewalk and The Butts footpath.

Site 8 Moat Sole, near the mini roundabout:



Pedestrians often need to cross to reach the supermarket and Cattle Market car park in this location. A raised table would also help to reduce driver speeds on approach to the mini roundabout.

Positive effects:

- Would highlight suitable areas for pedestrians to cross, and enhance visibility of pedestrians to approaching drivers.
- Could help to reduce driver speeds in the area.
- May discourage through traffic and make the by-pass more appealing route to avoid traffic calming.

Negative impacts:

- Raised tables may cause noise and vibration to nearby properties, depending on gradients and proximity of property walls / boundaries.
- May be unpopular due to use in conservation area.
- Could lead to drainage issues which will need to be addressed in detail at design stage.

Detailed design and survey costs (traffic counts): £2,650 per road

Potential scheme cost dependant on outcome of detailed design: Ranging from £3,000 per site to install a simple table consisting of black carriageway surfacing and conservation kerbing to £25,000 if drainage alterations are required, or expensive materials such as block paving used. Overleaf are some examples of what the tables can be expected to look like:



Proposal 4 option A – Install a one way system on Ramsgate Road Bridge

There are currently four routes in and out of Sandwich, with the entrances from Ramsgate Road across the river bridge and New Street approaching from Deal, being identified as the main north south route for through traffic. Previous proposals and attempts have been made to reduce the amount of use of the Ramsgate Road Bridge through re-introducing the toll, changing the existing phasing of the traffic lights etc. However, the proposal suggested during the site meeting leading to this report was for the bridge to be made one way allowing vehicles to exit Sandwich heading north. This was seen as the highest priority for the residents group as it would also help achieve most of its main targets outlined above. An injury related crash has been reported on the bridge, relating to pedestrian vehicle conflict.



Positive effects:

- Will reduce the amount of through traffic entering the town as drivers would be forced to use the by-pass when travelling from Discovery Park towards Deal / Dover.
- Reduce the amount of vehicle movements around the High Street and town square near the archway.
- Will make the bridge safer for use by pedestrians and cyclists, encouraging more economic forms of travel.
- Reduce difficult manoeuvres for buses and other vehicles around the archway which has led to ongoing damage to the bridge and other buildings.

Negative impacts:

- Local traffic / residents (as motorists) would be unable to access the town by the bridge from the Discovery Park direction.
- The bus service would have to be rerouted along the by-pass

Detailed design, advertisement and writing of Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) and survey costs (traffic counts): £2,995. The outcome of the TRO consultation is not assured success.

Potential scheme cost, dependant on outcome of detailed design: Ranging from £2,000 for simple signing and introduction of a one way traffic regulation order (TRO) to £15,000 if junction alterations are required at the roundabout next to the bridge to allow for larger vehicles / buses to turn back towards Discovery Park.

Proposal 4 option B – Amend phasing of the existing traffic lights at the Ramsgate Road Toll Bridge

There have been previous proposals to amend the phasing of the traffic lights at the Ramsgate Road toll bridge. There are various ideas behind this, one of them being to simply assist the flow of traffic by changing the length of times green phases are active, i.e. less changing of lights for longer green and red phases so more traffic can pass in one phase. Alternatively, it has been suggested that the traffic lights be amended so they work more in favour of vehicles leaving Sandwich to discourage through traffic and make the by-pass a more appealing alternative.



Positive effects:

- Could reduce the amount of through traffic entering the town as drivers might choose to use the by-pass when travelling from Discovery Park towards Deal / Dover.
- May reduce the amount of vehicle movements around the High Street and town square near the archway.

Negative impacts:

- Local traffic / residents (as motorists) may be inconvenienced by the increased waiting times at the traffic lights.

With the exception of the two options in proposal 4, the proposals detailed in this report could be used in conjunction with each other or individually based on funding and final decisions by relevant officers and elected officials.

Other measures discussed / suggested

- Introduction of bollards on the western side footway in High Street at various intervals where the footway is more than 2m wide. This could help to reduce vehicle speeds, as it has a narrowing effect, as well stop drivers from mounting the footway when travelling at speed, or to park. Bollards can be supplied and installed for between £200 and £400 each depending on size, type and location. Siting would be subject to location of underground utilities.
- Contacting Stagecoach to request that they use smaller buses when entering the town centre, and / or consider reducing the number of buses entering the town to ensure empty buses are not using the narrow roads unnecessarily. – Actioned by Ryan Shiel – This has previously been requested, but Stagecoach said that this would have a knock on effect to many services, particularly school buses which often empty completely when stopping outside the schools etc. Through proposed developments at Discovery Park there have been suggestions that a shuttle bus service could be provided using smaller buses to and from the town and new development in the future.
- Contacting the Highway Operations Team at KCC to request the white markings around the Moat Sole / Cattle Market junction be refreshed. – Actioned by Ryan Shiel – An enquiry has been raised with the Highway Operations Team to ask that the white lining be repainted in this area.
- Speed watch – Local speed watch schemes allow residents to help collect and present data regarding vehicle speeds in their local area. This can highlight repeat offenders and assist Kent Police with their enforcement.
- Introduction of a new North Sandwich coach park. Coaches and foreign buses regularly travel into the centre of the town and become stuck or lost trying to find somewhere to park. The town team highlighted the importance of ensuring tourists can reach Sandwich, but there is a lack of parking on the north and west approaches. However, this is a matter for Strategic Planners and Dover District Council to consider.

*Please be advised that all scheme costs at this stage are only estimations, and no detailed prices or quotes have been produced at the time this report was written.

**All scheme proposals detailed in this report would be subject to funding and a full consultation with elected officials, local associations and immediately affected residents.

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