



'Why I think we should act

By Martin Roche

THE PREVIOUS edition of Hilltop News asked interested residents to contact Kent County Council's Highways Department to register individual calls for a 30mph limit on Hollow Lane. So, I got on the computer and sent an e-mail calling not only for a speed reduction on Hollow Lane, but also on Merton Lane, where I live.

I got a reply from KCC within an impressively short time. Sadly, it's as bureaucratic as you could wish for. Let me try to make sense of it.

In January 2006 the Dept. of Transport issued new guidelines about roads like ours. The guidelines also required local roads authorities to review existing speed limits, "taking into account the conditions of a road and its personal injury crash history." The Dept of Transport didn't want to cause the roads authorities any stress, so the DOT gave them until 2011 to do the reviews.

Now let me quote the letter from KCC:

"In Kent we have decided that this is a priority and that no new speed limit applications should be considered until this work (the reviews referred to above) has been completed. The review of the A and B road speed limits began with a demonstration area in Maidstone and has now been extended into Mid Kent. East and West Kent will follow on. If a change of

speed is recommended as part of a crash remedial scheme this may be progressed before the speed limit review is completed."

What it says, if I have correctly interpreted things, is that they are seeking a formula that will apply across the county; and if a road ticks the right boxes it will be designated in a given way. The sensible way, of course, is to treat every road on a case by case basis, because no two roads are the same.

What it's also saying is that if you want to walk, run, cycle, ride your horse or drive your car in safety along these lanes you're going to have to wait until KCC gets round to us. That could be three years away, and even then they might not agree to a speed reduction.

Well, why should we wait? Why should our safety and quality of life be undermined while a great bureaucratic machine ticks boxes and writes volumes or reports?

We all know – a three year old knows – that these ancient roads are not suitable for traffic going at 40, 50 and even 60 mph. Privately, the people at Kent's Highways department might well agree, but they can't say so publicly because that's not the way things are traditionally done.

Of course, the central question in all of this is what are our democratically elected MPs and councillors doing to make our roads safer now? Some, I'm sure, are as frustrated and concerned about rules and procedures imposed by the DOT as the rest of us are. Others are hiding behind the rules because they

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