Progress Report from the Mary Tavy Parish Council Working Group on Speeding and Road Safety

Background

The public perception, shared by many serving councillors, is that an unacceptable number of vehicles pass through the village on the A386 well in excess of the speed limit. There are also incidences of vehicles overtaking others at speed in the 30mph zone.

In response to these concerns, councillors voted to form a Speeding Working Group at the parish council meeting held on the 14th August 2019. The Group comprises Councillors Butland (Chair), Fife Cook, Page and Reid.

The Group identified the following aims:

- *Improve safety for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians*
- *Improve safety for vehicular traffic joining the A386*
- *Reduce noise and environmental pollution*

These to be achieved by targeting reduction in speed through the village

3 possible approaches were identified by the Working Group to meet these aims:

- Install highly visible village gateway structures to alert drivers that they are entering a village environment with set speed limits
- Upgrade the 2 vehicle activated signs (VAS) we currently have in the village to versions that can record traffic data. The idea is that the data could be used to inform the police and Devon County Council Highways Department (DCCH) of the scale of the speeding problem, to determine the times of day that are most problematic and to provide more general information on traffic flow. By having better information, the aspiration is that we could influence decision makers and thereby improve road safety.
- Begin a new Speedwatch programme so that citizens can become actively involved in managing speeding issues in the parish.

A public meeting was held on 26th November 2019 to discuss the above topics. Feedback from that meeting indicated an interest in starting a parish-led Speedwatch campaign (this is currently on hold due to the Covid-19 outbreak) and in upgrading our VAS signs. There was less support at that time for the installation of village gateways.

It was emphasised at the public meeting that while the police and DCCH were supportive of Speedwatch, the Parish Council had been informed that neither organisation would accept data from the type of VAS sign under consideration. Despite this, there was strong support at the meeting that VAS with data recording facilities should be investigated further.

Speed Measurement in the Village

Shortly after the public meeting the Parish Council received data from DCCH from a speed recorder that had been installed for a little over a week on the A386 in the village. While the Council was not informed of the use of this recorder until after the event, we believe it was installed on the post holding the current VAS sign adjacent to the Down's garage site. The unit recorded vehicle numbers and speeds in both directions. Results provided by DCCH were surprising in that they showed that the 50th percentile speed of traffic in the 30mph zone was only 28.5mph (i.e. half the traffic is at this speed or below) and that 85% of traffic was travelling at or below 33.4mph. The 85th percentile value is used by DCCH and the police as a key value for assessing risk and DCCH's conclusion was that the 85th percentile value of 33.4mph in a 30mph zone was not high enough to require further speed reduction measures.

These DCCH results are lower than many people were expecting and so councillors resolved at the council meeting on 10th December 2019 to hire a device to collect data independent of DCCH and to use the results to help decide whether new VAS should be purchased (at significant expense to the parish). A Decatur Speedspy device was hired from Littlewood Hire Ltd to obtain the data. Information on the Speedspy and Littlewood Hire can be found at:
http://www.littlewoodhire.com/speedspy.html

The Speedspy was calibrated before receipt and has a claimed accuracy of +/- 1mph. The device only measures the speed of traffic approaching the unit so we chose to move it to different locations on the A386 to capture data for traffic travelling both north and south.

We chose a hire period from 16th January 2020 until 7th February 2020 to ensure that traffic flows were as normal as possible (i.e. outside of the Christmas / New Year period and school holidays). There were no extreme weather events during the hire period that might have affected traffic volumes or speeds. The unit operated 24 hours per day although there was a period of approximately 2 days where data was lost due to a faulty battery (the hire company gave us an additional week's hire for free as compensation).

The Speedspy was installed in 4 positions over the hire period:

- *Position 1:* Attached to a telegraph pole at the Royal Standard pub pointing south towards the Post Office. All traffic recorded in this position was travelling up the hill (northbound) in the 30mph zone
- *Position 2:* Attached to the same pole but rotated by approximately 180 degrees to point up the hill. Data from this position is treated with some caution as the measurement covers the transition from the 40mph zone in force when entering the village from the north to the 30mph zone
- *Position 3:* Attached to the telegraph pole a few metres north of the Post Office, pointing up the hill towards the Royal Standard. All traffic recorded in this position was heading down the hill (southbound) entirely within the 30mph zone
- *Position 4:* Attached to the post of the current VAS adjacent to Down's garage site and pointing down the hill towards the Post Office. All traffic recorded in this position was travelling up the hill (northbound) in the 30mph zone. We believe this is the same position as used by DCCH for their earlier data collection.

Results

The results for each of the 4 Speedspy positions are shown in some detail in the separate document "Charts and Tables" which contains a table and pie chart summarizing data for each Speedspy position as well as selected data for traffic travelling above 40mph at each hour of the day.

In total, data was recorded for 67,424 vehicles. In each of the 4 Speedspy positions a significant number of vehicles were speeding (often over 50%) but many of these were "only" 5 to 10mph over the limit. Only a very small minority (less than 1%) of vehicles were measured at speeds above 50mph.

If we set data for Position 2 aside (where the device was measuring some traffic speeds in the 40mph zone) and focus on Positions 1, 3 and 4 where all measurements were made entirely within the 30mph zone, less than 7% of vehicles are travelling at speeds of 41mph or higher although a very significant number are travelling between 31 and 40mph.

Combining the results for Positions 1, 3 and 4 and comparing them with the data generated by DCCH we can make the following comparison:

	50th percentile speed	**85th percentile speed**
DCCH	28.5mph	33.4mph
Speedspy (Positions 1,3 & 4 combined)	30.5mph	36.25mph
Speedspy (Position 4 only)	29.0mph	35.0mph

Speedspy (Position 4 only) is included because we understand that this is the same position as DCCH used and therefore is a direct comparison between DCCH and Speedspy.

The results show that while the Speedspy results are slightly higher than those from DCCH there is not a big difference between them. While a significant number of vehicles are travelling above the speed limit, the 85th percentile figures show that the large majority are "only" 5 or 6 mph above the limit.

When we look at the times of day when speeding is most prevalent (see the Charts and Tables document for data on 3 weekdays and a Saturday, selected at random) we see that the highest percentage of vehicles pass through the 30mph zone at over 40mph at "off peak" times i.e. from late evening, overnight and until about 7am the next morning. However, while there are a higher *percentage* of vehicles speeding during this period, the *actual* numbers are low because there are relatively few vehicles on the road. When we look at *total* numbers of vehicles speeding per hour there is a possible spike in the period around 6-7am and then a reduced, but still significant, number through the daytime period.

These results beg the question "where do we go from here"? If DCCH consider the speeds to be "safe" and not requiring further speed management measures, it is unlikely they will be persuaded otherwise by our results. We need to consider the following:

- Replacing the current VAS with units that record data would enable the Parish Council to continue to monitor the situation in the future and make informed decisions based on any changes in traffic behaviour.

- Investing in new VAS would involve spending a significant sum from parish funds: the cheapest replacement signs we have found to date are of the order of £1850 each, excluding installation costs.
- If we choose to replace the current VAS, we will need to obtain permission from DCCH, even if the cost is bourne by the parish.
- We know that – currently at least – neither DCCH nor the police are prepared to accept data from signs they have not bought and installed themselves. However, several other parishes in Devon have chosen to install signs with the aim of regularly sending data to DCCH and the police in the hope that they change their position at a future time.
- We accept that some drivers are travelling through the village at speeds very significantly above the limit. While they are a small percentage, they are generally the vehicles that make a lasting impression on the public and are clearly a risk to themselves and others.
- We could have the opportunity – if we elect to upgrade the VAS and subject to agreement by DCCH – to change to a more assertive display that shows the actual speed of a vehicle along with a warning, or a sign displaying a happy / angry face to have a greater visual impact. What we do not know is if a change in display would have a positive effect, a negative effect or no effect on speeding drivers. It could be that new VAS may remind those people who are unaware they are a few mph above the limit to slow down but would they have an effect of drivers travelling at, say, 45mph or above?
- An emotive question that must be asked is "what price a life?" This question is not asked in order to engage in emotional blackmail but it can be argued that just one life saved makes any expenditure justifiable. That is *if* any change in VAS has a positive result.

Clearly, with the Covid-19 outbreak, traffic flow is presently much reduced and the driving style of those still on the road may not be typical of more normal times. We cannot yet know how long it will be until traffic returns to normal levels or indeed whether traffic flows will be different in the long term to what they were pre-coronavirus.

The council will discuss and decide whether to invest in new VAS when council meetings are able to reconvene; once restrictions imposed because of the Covid-19 pandemic allow. Before we are able to meet to make that decision, there is the opportunity for parishioners to make their views known by contacting the Clerk of the Council, using the contact form on the website (https://marytavyparishcouncil.co.uk/) or email (parishclerk@marytavyparishcouncil.co.uk), or by contacting Councillor Nick Butland (Chair of the Speeding Working Group) at nick.butland@marytavyparishcouncil.co.uk.