



BINEGAR PARISH COUNCIL

A37 Gurney Slade road safety

Purpose and current position

This is a request for a site visit from *Somerset Highways* to discuss road safety issues.

At our Annual Meetings in 2017, 2018 and 2019, parishioners made clear that improving road safety in Gurney Slade was their top priority.

In 2017, we submitted a *Small Improvement Scheme*. It was not selected, there was no follow-up and there has been no further invitation to apply.

We therefore searched for more evidence to support our case. This included measuring traffic volumes and speeds* and seeking parishioners' experiences.

In 2018, we asked for re-lining of the road crown after top-dressing, particularly at the pedestrian crossing, to prevent dangerous overtaking but were refused.

We asked for a replacement speed safety camera for the one located south of the village. We had to resort to the *Freedom of Information Act* to find the responsible authority. Then there were no funds. *Highways* advised us to study the strategy, *Safe Roads in Somerset, 2017-26* and its *safe system* approach.

This is the third year with no road safety improvements while things have got worse.

A37 to Bristol

The A37 leaves Somerset above Farrington Gurney and passes through Temple Cloud, Clutton and Pensford. Safety improvements in all these villages include extended speed limit zones.

In Temple Cloud and Pensford, the road passes through village centres. Safety now includes:

- Speed safety cameras
- Vehicle activated speed indicator devices and speed limit reminder signs
- Resurfaced roads to make safety markings clear
- Double white lining to prevent overtaking
- Pedestrian controlled crossings
- One piece traffic islands to cover junctions and for pedestrian refuge
- Hatching to separate traffic lanes
- Cats' eyes in lit areas to ensure safety markings remain clear
- Removal of overtaking lanes
- Chicane at pinch points
- White lined kerbsides to mark the road/footway boundary
- Footway edge bollards to protect pedestrians

The comparison with the A37 into Somerset could not be starker. Gurney Slade has a pelican crossing but no road safety features to support it. The car and the lorry are king, using and abusing every part of the road. Pedestrians and cyclists are at the mercy of traffic. The standard of road safety is far behind what parishioners see just a few miles north.



Road safety issues

Around 9,000 vehicles a day pass through Gurney Slade, up 12% on 2014. One-in-eight are heavy goods vehicles, a proportion far higher than elsewhere and up 50% since 2000.

Speed

On March 5 2019, a blue car sped in from the south and drove through the red light of the pelican crossing, ignoring it. A boy of 11 years was crossing. He was alert and agile. To save himself, he had to leap – *leap* – out of the vehicle's reckless path. The car would have killed an older, less mobile person.

Speeding is a chronic problem. Without obstacles (roadworks in May 2018, snowfall in February 2019), more than two-in-three drivers break the speed limit. Drivers go faster in early mornings, evenings and at weekends.

20 years ago, it was considered right to enforce the speed limit with a speed safety camera, now derelict. Traffic volumes and speeds have increased, so now there is every reason to reinstate an enforcement camera.

Overtaking

Many HGVs join the A37 from Gurney Slade Quarry. Most mornings witness cars overtaking HGVs or other vehicles through or around the pelican crossing. The central road markings have no effect on driver behaviour.

In addition, there are few overtaking opportunities between Shepton Mallet and the Somerset boundary. Most days, then, cars use the straight stretch past Salisbury Terrace to overtake. This is one of the most perilous areas for pedestrians.

Volume and traffic weight

Traffic volumes compare with locations on the A37 further north where a road *safe system* approach operates. The density of heavy traffic, though, is greater in Gurney Slade. HGVs (and farm vehicles) have become larger while the road has not.

Traffic lanes, indeed, were narrowed in 2016 with a hatched central marking through the village. Where the road is wide enough, this forces traffic to the road edge and footway. Where the road is narrow, vehicles cross the hatching which serves only to confuse.

Lorries, now heavier and larger, often cannot pass each other without mounting the footway. Pedestrians have no protection, no segregation from traffic and injuries have resulted.

This abuse of the A37 wrecks road edges, footways, private drives and lay-bys. Problems we reported in 2018 include collapsed and damaged road edges, private drives and lay-bys, drainage problems, damaged footways, silt and overgrown vegetation.

Pedestrian and cyclist safety

It is the pedestrian who reaps the bitter harvest of the weight and volume of traffic and footway incursions of HGVs. Driver behaviour worsens the danger. The footway is unsafe. Pedestrians have no protection. Top dressing the A37 increased the danger for pedestrians with loose gravel strewn over the footway creating a slip hazard. The footway also does not run to homes on Marchant' Hill.

Cyclists face even greater danger. There are many more now using the Mendips for this leisure activity. For them, Gurney Slade's A37 is the no-go area that it has become for equestrians.



Somerset's safe roads strategy and Gurney Slade

The strategy has four elements: safe road users, safe roads and roadsides, safe speed, safe vehicles.

The strategy confirms that effective enforcement of speed limits is crucial to achieving a safe speed environment. We appreciate the new village nameplates which tell motorists they are entering a built up area. There is also bi-weekly police monitoring. Given our speed data, though, these have been insufficient to create a *safe speed environment*.

A safe systems approach for roadsides relies on segregation of different road users. The child on the pelican crossing and HGV incursions onto the footway shows how this is failing. The vulnerable are not protected.

In the past five years, eight vehicles have collided with the wall of the Post Office, demolishing parts of it. Other recent collisions knocked down several parts of the field wall north of Salisbury Terrace. These mishaps go unreported on road incident databases like *Crashmap*. They are, though, real and alarming. Broken stone walls also add hazards to footways.

The A37's southbound lane is heavily wooded and overgrown forcing its traffic towards the road crown and northbound traffic towards the footway. There are reflective posts from a past safety programme that accentuate this unfortunate tendency.

Conclusion

The A37's design through Gurney Slade is outdated. It is no longer able to meet the demands placed on it. Parishioners insist on action. The Parish Council agrees and believes road safety improvements are necessary, justified and required to:

- Enforce speed limits at village entrances
- Pacify vehicle speeds through the village
- Prevent overtaking
- Maximise the usable width of the road (to help accommodate larger vehicles)
- Accommodate the needs and safety of cyclists
- Redesign the road to:
 - Mark clearly the boundary between vehicles and pedestrians
 - Segregate and protect pedestrians from vehicles
 - Prevent footpath incursion by heavy vehicles

June 2019

* *Somerset Highways*: Speed Indicator Device results: November 2014, May 2015, August-September 2015, July-August 2016; Radar results: May 2018, February-March 2019.