



THE Chislehurst SOCIETY

Improving the Road System in Chislehurst

These notes were developed from a meeting of some Chislehurst Society members in April 2010 concerning how Chislehurst town centre could be improved, particularly as regards traffic flows. It is worth emphasising that the suggestions below are only some initial ideas for further discussion, and there are bound to be some issues that won't get unanimous support with any major road engineering scheme.



It is clear that the High Street, both north and south of the Willow Grove junction now has stationary traffic for much of the day. This is both visually intrusive and generates significant air pollution, making the High Street generally less attractive to visitors (see photo left for a typical view looking south from the junction with Willow Grove/Park Road). In addition the lack of smooth and uninterrupted traffic flow wastes people's time and there are probably improvements that could be made to the road safety aspects of the area.

In general it is not easy to see how traffic distribution and flows, e.g. along the High Street could be significantly improved by rerouting. Therefore the main ideas that seemed to be worth looking at are:

1. Generally improving the High Street between Albany Road and Prince Imperial Road by introducing a "shared space" scheme. This should include significant environmental improvements and redesign of the street scene, and the imposition of a 20 mph zone.
2. We suggest that the traffic lights at the junction of Willow Grove and Park Road be removed, and that consideration be given to the closure of Park Road at its junction with the High Street to support this. It is known from when the traffic lights have failed at this junction that traffic flows have improved considerably on all approach roads. But clearly there would be some concerns about road safety so the configuration of a revised junction would need to be looked at with care.
3. The parking at right angles to the High Street on the western side should be revised so fewer bays in parallel with the road are inserted instead (and they might be restricted to disabled drivers only). The current parking arrangements generate continual disruption to traffic flows (as is exemplified in the photo above) and tend to cause damage to the trees in that area.

This change would also enable more space for pedestrians to be provided, or perhaps even a cycle lane. Any reduction in parking capacity may be capable of being handled by the two large car parks off the High St, and the one at the Library which are rarely fully occupied. However, there are actually 41 car parking spaces in the High Street so removing them all might be a problem and any reduction in spaces would have to be carefully considered.

4. We also suggest that the traffic light controlled zebra crossings outside the Crown and Sainsburys be removed and replaced by pedestrian refuges, or at least replaced by ordinary zebra crossings. These crossings are currently not synchronised with the Willow Grove lights, and tend to cause disruption to the traffic flow. Some pedestrians also tend to ignore them as they prefer not to wait for the lights to change. To the right is a view of the High Street looking North outside Sainsburys.



5. All the above changes would improve the road for both pedestrians and vehicular users – although the latter might be slowed down by the new arrangements, there would be a more consistent steady flow so that traffic may flow more smoothly and predictably.

6. A further improvement that could be considered is the landscaping of the main car park to the east side of the High Street (behind the parade of shops that includes the sub-post office). At present this is a blank expanse of asphalt and hence is visually very unattractive (see photo to the right). The planting of trees and other landscaping could probably be incorporated with minimal loss of parking bays.



An example of a well designed and landscaped car park is on the left (Tesco, Wokingham).

Another more local example of a landscaped car park is shown in the photographs below (Sainsbury's car park in Farnborough, adjacent to the hospital), although it's not the most imaginative use of the space.



7. We also suggest that the original planning consents for Sainsburys in Chislehurst High Street regarding the size of HGVs and the routes they use to access the store be re-examined, as they seem to be creating difficulties at some times (effectively causing an obstruction due to inability to negotiate the Willow Grove junction).

8. Note that if Park Road was closed (except for access from the eastern end), then some traffic which was headed for Willow Grove or the High Street would need to divert – possibly along Greenway and the High Street, but that does not seem an unreasonable imposition.

9. It is perhaps difficult to imagine the High Street as we are proposing it should be redesigned. But we believe that it could be made a lot more attractive than it currently is, where the heavy volume of vehicular traffic and dense parking makes it visually and environmentally somewhat old fashioned. Modern “shared space” and other design options can now enable a much improved street scene to be developed, which can assist the commercial vitality of town centres. Road safety measures can also be incorporated at the same time.

10. A “shared space” scheme is basically a road which is shared by all users whether they be pedestrians, cyclists, car users or whatever. There is no clear demarcation between different spaces used by pedestrians and others, and no clear priorities at junctions. This is claimed to make all road users respect each other and hence minimise confrontations and accidents. There is a lot more information on shared space schemes on the internet and an interesting report from the Department for Transport on their use in the UK is present on this web page: www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/sustainable/sharedspace/stage1/pdf/stage1.pdf . Ashford ring road is now a shared space scheme, although that has not been without criticism from some quarters.

11. As regards the removal of traffic lights, a video that is well worth looking at that shows the impact of doing this in Portishead is here: www.wimp.com/trafficlights . It was produced by Martin Cassini who also has a web site with more information at www.fitroads.com

12. Orpington High Street has recently undergone extensive work and might show how it is possible to improve the environment without restricting traffic flows too much, but this uses only some of the typical aspects of modern street "re-engineering" and is not really a "shared space" scheme.

Roger W. Lawson, 31/7/2010