
FITTLEWORTH WEST SUSSEX

Tackling traffic and safety concerns through place-making and lower speeds



For Fittleworth & District Association

September 2018

Hamilton-Baillie Associates Ltd

September 2018

For Fittleworth & District Association

Version 01



Dean House
94 Whiteladies Road
Bristol
BS8 2QX
Tel: 0117 9114221
www.hamilton-baillie.co.uk

Introduction

The quality of public space is critical to the economic and social vitality of towns and villages. The streets and spaces between buildings provide the essential connections between the houses, shops, schools, pubs and meeting places, connections that define communities and underpin their identity. For villages to prosper, a coherent public realm is essential to provide the framework for the day-to-day human activity and exchanges that form the basis for village life.

For most villages, especially those on or close to major traffic arteries, it is the impact of vehicles and traffic that determines the quality of its public space. Every community relies on the connections and movement provided by the network of streets, lanes and roads. Buses, cars and lorries and the transport they provide will continue to be an essential component of towns and villages for many years. But traffic, and especially excessive speed, can also isolate and erode village life. The vitality and economic resilience of a community depends to a great extent on balancing the pressure from traffic whilst maintaining a coherent and attractive public realm.

For villages such as Fittleworth that lie along busy traffic routes, reaching such a balance is especially difficult. Busy traffic on both the east-west A283 as well as the north-south B2138 are gradually eroding the quality and connectivity of the historic village and suppressing opportunities to walk or bicycle between different part of the community and the surrounding area.

For this reason, Fittleworth & District Association has taken the initiative to explore fresh ideas and opportunities to address traffic issues. These brief notes follow a one day assessment and analysis that was undertaken in September 2018, and are intended to record some of the many issues, observations and recommendations that emerged from that study. They are not intended to resolve the major challenges faced by the community, but merely to provide some ideas and principles that can guide future initiatives by the Association, the Parish Council, West Sussex County Council, the South Downs National Park Authority and others.

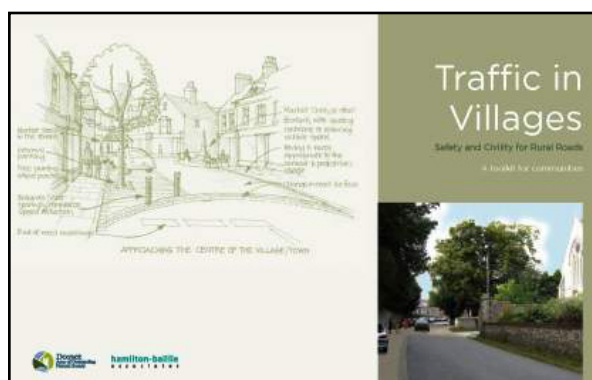


Background

Much work has already been carried out by the Association and its partners in identifying and addressing key issues for Fittleworth, especially in the provision of housing opportunities and tackling broader environmental concerns. But the issue of traffic and its impact on the community remains a critical challenge, especially the growing concerns about speeds and the size of the larger heavy goods vehicles.

To help address such concerns, the Fittleworth & District Association invited Ben Hamilton-Baillie, director of Hamilton-Baillie Associates, to visit the village, undertake an initial assessment of some of the core issues, and to present his initial observations and recommendations as part of an evening event in the Village Hall. The slides prepared for the presentation are available separately. The presentation both outlined the core principles necessary to reverse the gradual loss of public space to traffic, and explored the opportunities and challenges presented by the specific circumstances of Fittleworth. The analysis and observations focused on the village itself, but also touched on some of the smaller surrounding settlements such as Tripp Hill, Coates and Little Bognor.

Fittleworth is not alone in seeking fresh ways to address traffic issues. Across the South West of England and the rest of the UK concerns about traffic speeds, safety, pedestrian confidence and the quality of public space in towns and villages increasingly dominates local concerns. The publication of *Manual for Streets (2)*, alongside guidance such as *Traffic in Villages*, has provided renewed impetus to reconciling the realities of traffic with the qualities of streets and spaces that provide the economic and social basis for communities. The increasing limitations and shrinking resources of County and District Councils place more emphasis on local initiatives and neighbourhood plans as a means to engage community resources, creativity and energy to address issues such as traffic speeds and public space.



Fittleworth - the village

Fittleworth lies on the north bank of the River Rother, rising up the slope from two fine bridges over the main river and a mill stream. Further developments are scattered along the higher south bank on Tripp Hill. The main village is divided into a lower section, focused on the Swan Inn, and an upper section centred around a recreation ground, primary school and a soon-to-be-opened village shop. The village forms a clearing in an otherwise heavily wooded area, through which the main east-west A283 passes.

The widely differing dates of settlement explain the somewhat incoherent morphology of the village. It lacks a conventional focus of a village square or church front, and its form is not easily understood or perceived from its roads and lanes. Its population of just under 1,000 people are generally housed to the south of the main road, apart from some detached housing to the north of The Fleet (as the A283 is known along this section).

Pavements are generally narrow along both the major roads. Speeds feel significantly higher than is comfortable for a village environment. A Neighbourhood Speed Watch confirmed speeds as high as 55 mph as common. The levels of walking and cycling appear to be lower than would be expected in a village of this size. Heavy goods vehicles make up a significant proportion of the through traffic. Speeds appear to be especially high along the long, straight section of The Fleet, and also on the sloping B2138 or Lower Street running north-south through the village.

In general the village has maintained its eclectic and distinctive character despite the growing pressure from traffic. Conventional heavy traffic calming, signs and other highway measures are few. However dominant white centre-lining, hatching and other road markings are very evident throughout much of the village, bringing a strong element of highway characteristics into the complex and intricate streets and spaces. Overall Fittleworth gives the impression of a place that has still just managed to retain its identity in the face of growing pressure on its streets and spaces.



Fittleworth triangular form within a wooded landscape



The village emerges as the A road emerges from the woods



The long straight, and fast length of The Fleet on the northern edge

Initial observations

Fittleworth is remarkably rich in historic buildings and attractive combinations of houses. Its outstanding setting in the National Park and its proximity to larger market towns makes it an especially desirable place to live. It is also evident that the community has the resources and confidence to take initiative in areas such as the provision of a community shop. It is a village that is aware of its qualities and keen to protect them.

But Fittleworth also exemplifies a community in retreat from the public realm represented by its streetscape. Driver behavioural research suggests that, above all, traffic speeds are determined by the degree to which drivers sense an absence of human activity. As speeds rise, so human activity retreats from streets and public spaces. Thus a vicious cycle is created; children play in gardens rather than on the street, conversations and exchanges in public become less evident, and traffic takes over the external environment. This

process is observable in Fittleworth, where little public interaction takes place in the streets and roads. The school is barely visible from School Lane, and the excellent new community shop building turns away from the street. With the notable exception of the magnificent arch outside the Swan Inn, there is little outward expression of the village and its life for drivers passing through. It seems likely that this is contributing to the understandable concerns about speed, and to the gradual erosion of village quality as a result of traffic.

The key task in developing a traffic strategy to underpin any village plan therefore lies in seeking ways to reduce speeds, to raise driver awareness of the presence of the village, and to find ways to retain and promote human activity. The presentation explored some of the opportunities in Fittleworth for shifting this balance away from highway characteristics to a shared public realm.



The Highway

- Regulated
- Impersonal
- Linear
- Single Purpose
- Consistent
- Predictable
- Systematic
- State controlled
- Signs and markings



The Public Realm

- Culturally defined
- Personal
- Spatial
- Multi-purpose
- Constantly changing
- Unpredictable
- Contextual
- Cultural / social rules
- Multiple human communications

hamilton-baillie
associates

Design principles

Conventional traffic calming measures such as speed humps and chicanes are unlikely to achieve the change in driver responses necessary, and can tend to add to frustration and higher speeds elsewhere. Amendments to the current speed limits are also unlikely to be effective on their own, even with the necessary enforcement. By contrast, the appropriate change in speeds and driver expectations can be achieved by introducing a combination of more subtle modifications to the streetscape known to slow traffic and improve safety.

The first such change relies on creating a clear point of transition between the faster approaching highways and the context of the village centre. A distinctive change in scale and street characteristics on the boundaries of the village helps alert drivers to the change in circumstances. This is particularly important where, as in Fittleworth, two busy roads run through the village.

Secondly, lower speeds can be fostered by reducing the apparent widths of carriageways. This can be achieved through modifying verge

and kerb details, and by avoiding the wide sweeping geometries of bends and junctions associated with high speed highways.

Thirdly, reducing the linearity of streets, and emphasising their relationship to adjacent buildings, can reduce speeds. Removing or minimising road markings such as centre lines can help change the perception of linearity. Lower speeds result where streets are punctuated by a series of perceived spaces or “events”, which reduce the linear characteristics. Animation and activity alongside the carriageway in drivers’ peripheral vision, sometimes referred to as “edge friction”, is an additional factor in modifying the speed environment.

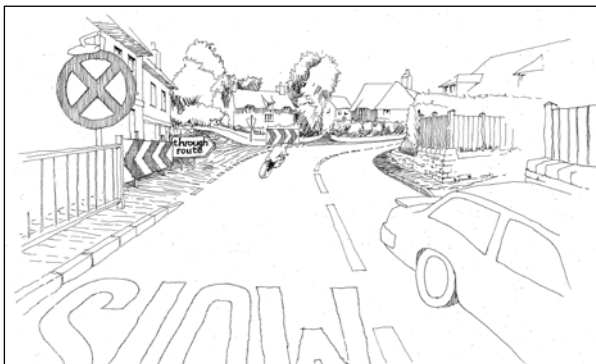
Above all, the extent to which a village is perceived as a place in its own right, rather than a mere stretch of highway, influences drivers’ speed and expectations. Such place-making is key to achieving more balanced, low-speed streetscapes, helping to punctuate the linearity of long “corridor” routes. Lower speeds in turn enhance the potential for establishing places, creating more forgiving road environments better suited to the complex unpredictable context of a village.



Narrow visual widths and edge friction. Poynton



Place-making, edge-friction and clear links between street and building. Italy



The street as highway



The street as place

Village entry points

In order for drivers to adapt their speed and expectations to the context of a village, clear and consistent gateways or transition points are necessary. Ideally the appearance of buildings and village life corresponds with a reduction of scale and apparent width of the carriageway, combined with the absence of centre lines. Fittleworth lacks such clear transition points, and as a result speeds associated with the highway leech into the village.

From the east, the current placename sign lies far outside the village, which only begins to appear where 'The Fleet' emerges from the woods. There is a similar lack of clarity where the A283 enters the village from the west. The arrival point is close to the sharp bend at 'Allelujah Corner', where the road enters the village from the dense woodland. It may be possible to create a sense of arrival by changing the layout of the junction of the A283 with Lower Street (the B2183), but it is really the edge of the woods that defines the village boundary.

There are few significant difficulties with the quieter lanes, such as Bedham Lane, that enter Fittleworth from the north. It is the third entry point into the village from the south, the B2183, where the transition gateways need clarifying.

Lower Fittleworth grew up around connections with a water mill and the river, and it is the two bridges over the River Rother and the mill stream that mark the southern edge of the village. These handsome bridges could serve as much clearer landmarks and points of entry than the current road arrangement allows. Drivers approaching Fittleworth are offered few clues to the significance of the bridges, with the centre lines reinforcing the uninterrupted linear continuity. Minor changes in surface or texture could transform these assets into clearer places of transition.

The superb Millennium arch by the Swan Inn has the potential to serve as a very clear entry point. But the effect is diminished by the unbroken continuity of the road markings running into the village. Here again relatively minor measures to identify the public space outside the Swan Inn would contribute to reducing the speed context of Lower Fittleworth.



The approach to Fittleworth from the east along The Fleet (A283). The village itself is still a considerable distance away.



The long straight approach through the woods, where the village first begins too make its presence visible.



Similarly the western edge of the village is only perceived where the road emerges from the woods, well beyond the village nameplate.



Unbroken centre lines diminish the awareness of the Rother bridge.

Place-making

Linked with clear entry points, the concept of place-making is a critical component of the toolkit for improving traffic in villages. Empirical research indicates that driver speeds and behaviour can be modified and improved through awareness of a distinctive set of places or memorable spaces through which routes pass. Such routes punctuate the linear continuity of the driver's perspective, and contribute strongly to emphasizing the unpredictable and multi-purpose context of a village.

Such places need not be formal spaces or village squares, greens or market spaces. Very simple measures to help frame spaces and provide a clear connection between buildings and adjoining space are often sufficient. A line of setts, or a slight change in paving can be enough.

Fittleworth has no distinct village square, but there are numerous places where potential focal points have been eroded by the linearity and dominance of the highway. The triangular space outside the Swan Inn is one, where a combination of outside space and car park could be made an integral part of the road entering the village. The sharp turn at Allelujah Corner is another important opportunity to create a place, with the chestnut tree at its centre, rather than a mere sharp bend in the road.

There are numerous additional locations where simple measures to reinforce a sense of place would significantly ameliorate the speed and impact of traffic. The junction at the southern end of Church Lane is one, where the church yard and path emerge onto Lower Street. The small war memorial and benches create another opportunity to provide an identifiable landmark.

Further opportunities to animate the streetscapes and to reduce their linearity exist throughout the village. They are particularly important for streets such as The Fleet and School Lane, where traffic tends to travel especially fast or where pedestrian and bicycle activity are expected. School Lane in particular would benefit from minor place-making, especially around the school and shop entrance, neither of which are clearly evident from the street. The courtyard outside Old School House provides another opportunity where the street could form part of a distinctive place.



The Swan Inn forecourt offers an opportunity to create a coherent place



Allelujah Corner has potential as an entry space and key landmark



The junction of Church Lane & Lower Street outside the churchyard



The War Memorial on Lower Street - an understated informal space

Slower speeds - removing centre lines

One simple and cost-effective measure to reduce the linearity of the street is to remove (or not replace) the central white line. They merely facilitate faster driving. Communities such as Rogate, Buriton and West Meon have seen the

benefits of deleting road markings. The quick illustrations below begin to explore the change in driver perception that can be brought about by a clear policy of restricting lining to the higher speed highways outside the village entrances.



Creating a village visible to drivers

Given the volume and pressure from traffic, it is not surprising that Fittleworth has tended to gradually turn its face away from the busy streets and look inwards. The danger with this creeping process is that drivers become less conscious of the presence of the village, and speeds increase.

The Fleet, running east-west across the northern edge of Fittleworth is especially lacking in places and incidents that would alert drivers to the complexity and uncertainty to expect in a village. The few houses to the north are divided from the village core by The Fleet, and hide their presence behind screens of trees and bushes. An important footpath crosses the main road, but is entirely ignored by the road arrangement. Even an important if modest bus shelter, and important arrival point for residents, is given no recognition by the relentless road markings.

School Lane is quieter, but still lacks the manifestation of community life that would help establish a low speed environment. The school is difficult to identify from the street, and the carriageway feels inappropriately wide and fast. Some visual narrowing and interruptions to the carriageway would be very beneficial in encouraging more pedestrian and bicycle activity.

We would recommend that every opportunity be taken to create places, informal crossings or incidents that interrupt the linearity of such streets. The creation of simple roundels to create places at either end of School Lane could help, as could a range of measures to highlight pedestrian movement, such as where village footpaths cross the road.



Places like a bus shelter offer opportunities to interrupt and animate



The School Lane junction with The Fleet could become a distinct place



School Lane requires more indications that it serves as the village centre



The excellent footpath network could be more visible to drivers

Reclaiming Fittleworth's streetscapes

The impact of through traffic, and the increasing pressure resulting from speeds and vehicle numbers leaves Fittleworth especially vulnerable to the erosion of the very qualities that makes it such an attractive village. The vicious circle described on Page 5 is beginning to damage the coherence, identity and quality of the streetscapes and spaces that contribute to Fittleworth's public realm. To reverse this process requires both an awareness of this gradual erosion, and the harnessing of the creative energies of the community at large. It is essential that, as far as is possible, the streets and roads "tell the right story" to drivers about the nature and purpose of the public spaces in the village.

This does not necessarily require expensive and complex engineering. The Village Hall discussions included a wide range of examples where local communities had used a variety of measures, sometimes ephemeral, to change driver perceptions and expectations. From the village scarecrow characters created by Lockeridge in Wiltshire, to the use of bunting, surface painting and street activities by North Oxford residents, the potential to turn the village to face outwards and to connect across busy roads was explored. Such initiatives are closely linked to the process of place-making, and the importance of punctuating the linearity of traffic routes with as much incident and variation as possible. Regaining busy sections of route, such as the A283 and the junction with the B2138 will require more support from the highway authority, but is essential if the village is not to be fragmented and isolated by traffic flows. This does not require traffic volumes to be curtailed, but it does require reductions in speeds and changes in the expectations and awareness of drivers. The Swan Inn forecourt, Allelujah Corner, School Lane and many other locations need to be treated as visibly and psychologically part of the village.

Intrigue, ambiguity, uncertainty are not traditionally associated with highway design. But it is these qualities combined with measures such as the removal of centre lines, the narrowing of carriageways and the emphasis on pedestrian movement that will help reclaim village space.



Scarecrows to populate and animate a village - Lockeridge, Wiltshire



Surprise and intrigue - rubber ducks in potholes. Cherwell, Oxfordshire



A simple roundel turns a traffic intersection into a place. Brittany



The surprisingly effective traffic calming of human activity in the road

Summary conclusions

Fittleworth is a highly distinctive, attractive and thriving village. It benefits from an energetic District Association and Parish Council prepared to take the initiative in addressing local concerns. As the village grows and develops, opportunities exist to begin to reverse the disadvantages associated with traffic pressure. The initial visit and these brief notes are intended to establish some core principles to guide this process.

It seems unlikely that the quality of Fittleworth will be enhanced by heavy engineering or conventional traffic calming. Changes in speed limits without changes in road character and context are rarely effective. Additional road markings, signs and additional clutter will do more harm than good. Major traffic management, one-way systems or road closures are inappropriate. A successful strategy is likely to involve working with the existing traffic, rather than fighting against it.

Clearer boundaries to highlight the transition between higher-speed highways and a low-speed village are essential. So are clearer crossing points and connections where the village extends across any road. Removing any measures such as centre lines that contribute to the linear continuity of roads is essential, combined with small-scale

measures that emphasize the village context. Fittleworth offers many opportunities for simple place-making as a means to slow speeds and reverse the erosion of public space to traffic.

Fittleworth is helping plan its future at a time of diminishing resources and confidence amongst planning and highway authorities. Although their engagement remains essential, small-scale initiatives based on local creativity and knowledge are likely to be more effective in reversing the loss of public space to traffic. To this end it is essential that a community can benefit from ideas and experience from other places tackling similar problems. A programme of visits and observations can help retain enthusiasm and reduce the learning curve for a small parish council.

Above all, a strategy to retain and improve the quality of Fittleworth as a safe and coherent village requires an awareness of the power of multiple, small measures which can combine to ameliorate the impact of traffic. Simply walking down the middle of the road wherever and whenever possible, or finding ways to extend the notion of a village into the road, can underpin a plan for preventing and reversing the damage inflicted by traffic volumes and speeds.

