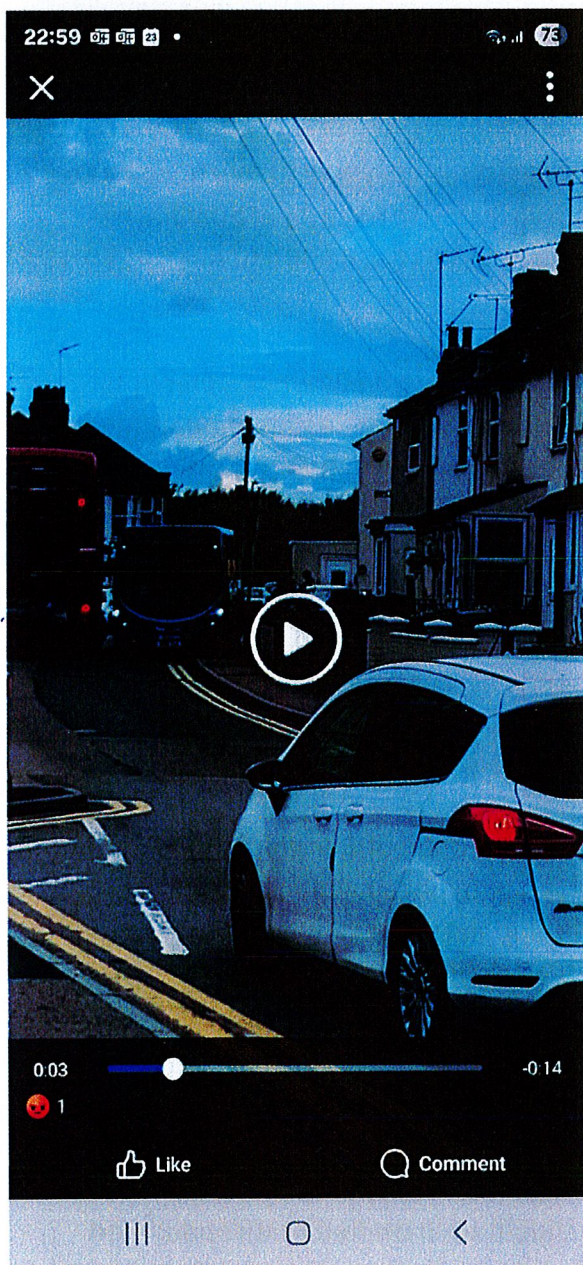


Proposals for Traffic Management in the northern part of Stanhope Road, Swanscombe

Background



Stanhope Road has suffered from heavy traffic problems for many years even before the collapse of Galley Hill. It is on the shortest direct route from the A2 to the A226. Some years ago a traffic calming scheme was implemented in the wider southern half of the road to reduce speeds and provide a safer environment. Those same measures are now presenting obstacles to the free flow of the increased traffic flow due to the collapse of Galley Hill. This is further compounded by the use of the route by 5 scheduled 480 bus services each way per hour plus the Go2 demand led service. The much narrower northern part of the road which is only one lane with a short 2 car passing place provides even more problems particularly when 2 buses meet. Sometimes there is gridlock which is only resolved by vehicles mounting the pavement. The 30mph speed limit means some car and van drivers drive too fast to allow themselves to make sensible "Give Way" choices at the pinch points which again can lead to gridlock as vehicles try to back up and/or mount the pavement.

Proposals have been put forward for a one way system using Albert Road and Church Road for northbound traffic but these have been rejected by KCC

This paper considers 2 proposals to manage the traffic flow in this road in a more controlled way. The first looks at some minor changes to road layouts, signage and speed limits in an attempt to modify driver behaviour so that better use is made of the passing place at the junction with Hope Road. The second considers the benefits and challenges of a more expensive traffic light system to direct traffic through the restriction.



Proposal 1

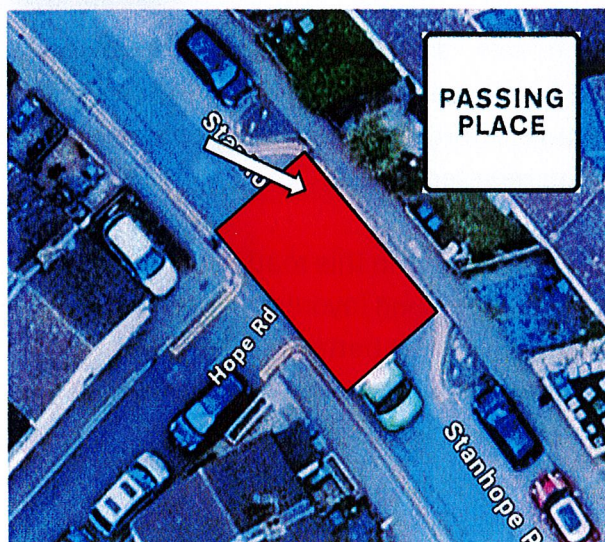
Highway changes to modify driver behaviour

From my observations from the pavement over several evenings from 5pm to 6pm it is clear that a lot of the congestion problems are caused by drivers making poor decisions often due to their haste to get through the restriction. This means that vehicles travelling in both directions overshoot the passing place and meet oncoming traffic in the one vehicle width part of the street when a more patient approach would have allowed them to pass safely in the passing place. Even when southbound vehicles do stop they have often left it too late to pull into the passing place sufficiently deeply to allow northbound traffic to pass without mounting the pavement. This is particularly true of buses who only just fit in the passing place even if they have anticipated the need and act soon enough to tuck their back end in.

I would suggest that this part of Stanhope Road is subject to a 20mph speed limit. It may have no effect on some drivers but it is likely that the majority would moderate their speed. Incidentally I think there is a case for the whole of the High Street from All Saints Close to the Junction of Stanhope Road to also be part of the 20mph zone. The existing 20mph traffic calmed zone in the southern part of Stanhope Road also needs to be more clearly marked with both upright signs and 20mph road markings. I realise that this change would require a traffic order of some kind but I believe it can be justified on safety grounds if it has the potential to reduce speeds sufficiently to ensure drivers have more thinking time when they meet the restrictions in the road caused by oncoming traffic.



In addition either end of this narrow section of Stanhope Road should have the conventional narrow road with passing places signs. To reinforce its function the road surface at the passing place could then be coloured red. Also a bear left arrow would encourage drivers to enter the passing place before proceeding when it is clear to do so.



Whilst the cynical will say too many drivers ignore road signs for them to make a difference I believe sufficient might both moderate their speed and use the passing place sensibly if alerted by signs to reduce the problem.

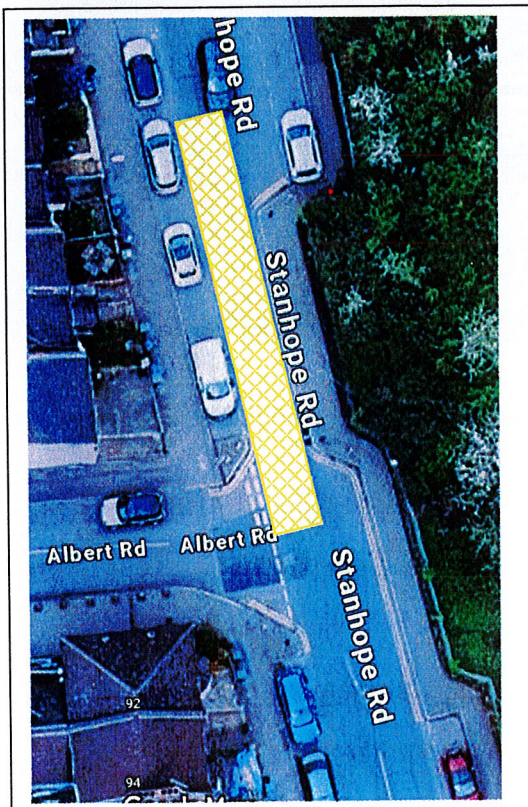
A further traffic calming measure for northbound traffic would be to utilise the short stretch of wider than usual road just south of the one track section to create an additional “Chicane” that prompts a slower speed on entry to this section. It would also allow a space for the single track road sign to be erected.

It would be important that this restriction did not protrude into the carriageway too much otherwise it will restrict the room for traffic to queue which is caught by the restriction at Albert road (see later). A white keep left arrow on the road might also help.

Further Congestion can be caused when the traffic queues either end of the one track part of the road reach the High Street in the north and the traffic calming chicane at the junction with Albert Road. Although this is normally only a problem at extremely busy times it is a major issue when the road becomes overloaded with traffic when there are problems on the A2. There are a couple of alterations that could reduce the problem.



New width restriction with Passing Place signs.



At the junction with Albert Road an extended Box junction marking could be used to discourage northbound vehicles from queuing in the restricted width part of the road and to leave space for southbound vehicles to pass. This should prevent gridlock at the entrance to the single track portion further north.

At the high street end there is scope to increase the width of the carriageway by using space occupied by a wider than needed pavement outside the parade of shops opposite the junction. In addition some barrier fencing alongside the double yellow line on the eastern pavement could discourage illegal parking that also restricts the carriageway, (see diagram below in proposal 2)

Proposal 2 – Traffic Lights



This proposal suggests that KCC implement a short term traffic light trial at the locations shown on the diagram using temporary lights at peak times monitored by Highways Officers to observe the effects on traffic flow and congestion. If the trial were successful then a permanent scheme could be implemented.

To avoid a 3 way requirement Hope Road would need to be One Way away from Stanhope Road. There are only a couple of properties on this road and it is mainly used for on street parking for houses in Stanhope Road and Church Road.

If tailbacks did occur that threatened gridlock at the end of Albert Road then consideration could be given to an extended box junction as outlined in proposal 1.

Likewise If a similar problem were to occur in Swanscombe High Street the wider than needed pavement in front of the parade of shops marked in orange could be slimmed down to provide a wider carriageway at the junction with Stanhope Road. In addition barrier fencing on the opposite side of the road marked in red would discourage parking on the double yellow lines which also restricts the available width. Alternatively the first section of double yellow lines could be marked out and designated as much needed southbound Bus Stop for the 480. Although when a bus stops there it would impede traffic flow it would only be for a short period and the rest of the time drivers are less likely to use it for illegal parking.

An argument can be made that as the dominant traffic flow is now between the High street and Stanhope Road rather than the High Street and Milton Road then this entire junction needs to be redesigned with the Give Way in Milton Road and not Stanhope Road and a corresponding realignment of kerbs and traffic islands,

That said if the lights are timed to allow about 6 cars through at a time my observations are that under normal peak traffic flow there should be enough room to accommodate the queues without any carriageway adjustments. A short peak time trial with temporary lights under Highways Officer supervision can be used to confirm this. At the moment frequent conflicts and gridlock at the short passing place are proving a hindrance to free flow and causing larger tailbacks than that which I believe is likely to be caused by traffic lights.

It is possible that in order to cope better with extra high traffic flow when there are problems on the A2 that these carriageway alterations would prove very beneficial.

The other significant benefit of enforcing alternate flows of one way traffic is that there will no longer be any need for a vehicle to mount the pavement creating a much safer environment for pedestrians.

That said there is one additional safety hazard that would have to be addressed. When vehicles are parked outside the houses between the 2 sets of lights they would need to

know when it is safe to move out into the carriageway. This is relatively simple when there is a reasonable flow of traffic by simple observation of which way the cars are passing. It is more difficult in times of low traffic flow (particularly at night) when it might not be clear how the lights are set and which direction it is safe to move in. There are 2 possible solutions to this. The first is to have a set of repeater lights facing into the narrow section on the back of the main lights showing the same aspects as the lights at the other end. Then a driver facing north could see when the southern lights are green from the display on the back of the northern set of lights showing that they can safely pull out and proceed north. At the same time by looking in their mirror or over their shoulder they could see when the Northern lights are red from the repeater on the back of the southern lights which confirms that it is safe to pull out and proceed north as there will be no southbound traffic. The same applies in reverse for a car parked facing south. If it is felt that these repeater lights would be too confusing for the main flow of traffic, especially when the lights change when a car is only part of the way along the section then perhaps they could be moved back to the small islands that mark either end of the current passing place which under this scheme would be solely a delivery drop off space.

An alternative to the repeater lights would be an adaptation of a pedestrian crossing system where a driver presses a button sited at the passing place and then proceeds to their car. After a suitable pause to allow the driver to get settled in their car both sets of lights are set to red with sufficient time for the parked car to exit the section. Some kind of flashing light (perhaps amber) on the back of the traffic lights facing into the section would indicate to the driver of the parked car that it is safe to proceed.

I do have one final suggestion which I know has been rejected before but would help eliminate some of the rogue lorries. Can we please have a Plain English Sign on Southfleet Road just before the Roundabout with Castle Hill Drive which reads:

NO ACCESS TO A226 FOR HGVS.

USE ROUNDABOUT TO RETURN TO DIVERSION VIA A2.

The majority of the current problems are with UK registered lorries. Some drivers may still ignore it but some might take heed.

These proposals are not officially endorsed by either the Town Council or Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town Council but they are the result of discussions with both residents and other councillors.

Councillor Graham Taylor
Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town Council