



Stow Community Council and Stow Community Trust Spaces for People Consultation proposal.

Background

Since the start of lockdown, the people of Stow have had an opportunity to experience life with reduced traffic on the A7 and surrounding minor roads. This has led to a dramatic increase in the numbers and frequency of people cycling and walking around the village, rather than using their cars, to access local services such as the shop/post office and health surgery. There has also been a big increase in the numbers taking advantage of the walking and cycling on surrounding minor roads particularly “the back road” (C11) for their recommended daily exercise. The impact on health and wellbeing has been significant with people experiencing the benefits of both regular exercise and increased social interaction. This is creating a much stronger sense of community and has helped to reduce the risks of loneliness and isolation during lockdown.

Over a number of years, Stow Community Council has made representations to Scottish Borders Council highlighting their concerns about the impact of the speed of traffic going through the village on the health and wellbeing of the community. This remains the single biggest factor that concerns parents of young children in the village and prevents children being able to walk and cycle safely around the village leading to an over reliance on cars for short journeys. Plans have now been agreed for the funding and erection of two speed indicators for motorists along the A7.

Led by Stow Community Trust (SCT), building and construction work is underway to renovate the Old Station House and establish a Bar/Kitchen, Cycling Hub and Community Room. The aim of the project is to use this development to re-invigorate the local economy, create a

more connected community within Stow, strengthen relationships between communities along the Gala Water, support active travel and establish the Gala Water Valley as a cycling and walking destination.

The opening of the Borders Railway has led to a dramatic increase in the number of people in Stow and the surrounding area using public transport instead of their cars, to travel to Galashiels and Edinburgh. Covid-19 has now created new risks for public transport users. Our proposals, outlined below, provide viable alternative safe modes of transport, particularly for commuters to Galashiels and the Central Borders, who have become dependent on the train for essential journeys.

The following proposals have emerged from consultation with the local community.

1. Reduce speed in the village to 20mph

The proposal is that the speed limit on all roads within the village should be reduced to 20 mph. The community has experienced the reduction of the volume of traffic during lockdown and the impact that it has on our community, enabling people to feel safer walking and cycling around the village. This proposed reduction in the speed limit would enable the community to maintain these conditions and would be of particular benefit to families with young children who are unable to allow their children to move around the village independently.

In addition, the location of speed limit signs should be reviewed on all minor roads around Stow to ensure they reflect the needs of pedestrians and walkers in the village e.g. the location of the 30 mph speed limit sign on the Lauder Road does not take into account the safety needs of children and young people who regularly use a track off the Lauder Road to access nearby woods for cycling.

Traffic calming measures should start before Galabank on the A7 with a 30 mph limit there and then reducing to 20mph at the current location of the speed limit sign at the entrance to the village. Additional traffic calming measures should be implemented, such as temporary speed cushions to strengthen the communication of the changes to motorists and serve to encourage HGV drivers to make use of the A68 main truck road.

Implementation of these proposal will require the replacement of speed limit signage around the village. It will be supported by the agreed plans

for the erection of two speed indicator signs along the A7 in Stow as already agreed by the Community Council.

These changes would benefit the whole community and support active travel around the village particularly families with young children. It would result in a reduction in the use of cars for essential short journeys to the Primary School, the Health Centre, the Post Office and Shop.

2. Reduce the speed limit on the “back road “ (C11) between Heriot and Clovenfords to 30 mph.

It is difficult to fully articulate the benefits that the communities of Fountainhall and Stow derived from the back road (C11) during lockdown. The volume of traffic reduced significantly. Motorists using the road were residents and farmers who were respectful of the needs of cyclists and walkers. The road has been busy with cyclists and walkers. We are now beginning to see the impact of both an increased volume of traffic and speed of vehicles. This is likely to have an adverse effect on the numbers of people cycling and walking. Our proposal is that a speed limit of 30 mph should be applied to the road from Heriot to Clovenfords so that local communities can continue to benefit from the use of the road for cycling and walking.

3. A Cycleway between Fountainhall and Stow

Fountainhall is just 4 miles from Stow. The local population travel to Stow for Post Office, Shop, Café, the Health Centre, Church Services and the Railway Station. A cycleway along the C11 would support more people to cycle for these essential journeys. A reduction in the speed limit to 30 mph and signage along the C11 would be adequate temporary measures to give cyclists the confidence to cycle or walk this route safely.

4. A Cycleway between Stow and Galashiels

The proposal is that a temporary cycleway should be established between Stow and Galashiels. The route would follow the C11 to the left hand turn just beyond Ferniehurst farm where it would then follow the off-road track past the sawmill onto the B710 and then right along the B710 to Clovenfords where it would join the Clovenfords cycle route alongside the A72 and the Clovenfords link into Galashiels. The route is 9.84 miles with a climb of 728 feet outwards and 924 feet on the return journey. The temporary improvements required to establish this cycleway are:

- implementation of a reduced speed limit of 30 mph on the C11 and the B710;
- signage to ensure that motorists are aware that this is a dedicated route for cyclists, and
- some remedial work on the road surface.

This route would be of particular benefit to students accessing Galashiels Academy and Borders College as well as commuters to Galashiels and onwards to other destinations in the Central Borders. It will provide an alternative for commuters who before the pandemic had been reliant on bus and rail to commute to work and now no longer wish to use public transport because of the public health risks involved. It will also ensure increased resilience and maintain mobility for local communities in the event of a further spike in the pandemic locally.

Galashiels Academy has been involved in discussions about this proposal and is very supportive. There has been a significant increase in the numbers of young keen cyclists in Stow in recent years. It is their view and that of a number of parents and pupils that this pathway will be used by students. The school already has good storage facilities for bikes and workshops.

This cycleway has the potential to open up the Gala Water valley for cyclists and bring longer term economic benefits to local communities as well as contributing to the development of an integrated network of cycle pathways in the Central Borders

5. Cycle parking facilities in Stow and Fountainhall

The provision of bike parking facilities in the centre of Stow and beside the Village Hall in Fountainhall is also required. The only bike parking facilities are at the Railway Station in Stow. The provision of additional facilities beside the Shop and Café in Stow would give cycling much more visibility in both villages, encourage local people to cycle for short essential journeys and encourage touring cyclists to stop in the village and use local facilities.

6. Traffic calming measures on the B6362

The B6362 is being used more frequently by people from Stow to access the Lauder Common and Sell Moor for walking and off-road cycling. In recent years there has also been a growing number of people shopping in Lauder. The condition of the B6362 makes cycling or walking on it very difficult so most people drive to the Lauder Common to go for a

walk. This is an unnecessary use of cars. Traffic calming measures such as the reduction in the speed limit up to the cattle grid at the entrance to the Lauder Common could create the conditions that would encourage people to walk and make off road cycling on the Common more accessible particularly for children and young people.

Implementation

These temporary improvements have the potential to be implemented quickly. From the engagement process that we have undertaken there is widespread support for these initiatives across the communities of Stow and Fountainhall. Local people are confident that these changes will support them to maintain the behavioural shifts that they have already made during lockdown to walk and cycle for local essential journeys and their recommended daily exercise.

Stow Community Trust and the Parish of Stow Community Council are committed to working with partners and the local community to support the delivery of these proposals and provide potential users with any support that they may require to maximise their use of them as well as monitor their impact.

Although all of these proposals are temporary, our ambition is that they will achieve the attitudinal and behavioural changes required to make a lasting change to the community's commitment to greener travel solutions. They will also serve as a catalyst for our ambitions to develop a network of cycle pathways linking Stow with other communities including Lauder, Innerleithen and beyond.