

Boughton and Dunkirk Neighbourhood Plan

Background Document BD4 - Traffic and Transportation.

Introduction:

“Our vision is for a transport system that is an engine for economic growth, but one that is also greener and safer and improves quality of life in our communities.”

This vision was stated by the Department for Transport in its 2011 white paper “Creating growth, cutting carbon, making sustainable local transport happen.” Boughton and Dunkirk consider that there is a real danger that development pressure for new housing, whilst supporting economic growth, will overload our already stretched transport network and reduce our quality of life.

Forecasts of the increase in population in Swale have varied over the last few decades. Swale Borough Council’s Transportation Strategy 2014-2031 foresaw 23,000 new homes and 40,000 new jobs by 2021 but every projection, from whatever level of government believes that the increase in population will be considerable, with a consequent increase in the pressure on Kent roads and on the villages that are the subject of this plan. It should be noted that virtually one-third of the land which is proposed for 2,550 new homes by the Duchy of Cornwall lies in the Boughton Parish, as it stretches along the A2 from Tin Bridge Oast to Brenley Corner. The 5,000 new homes proposed along the A251 from the south side of the A2 towards Sheldwich, will, if built, further increase the pressure on our community’s road network.

Roads

Boughton and Dunkirk are linear communities on the line of the old A2 linking London and Dover. This was and still is to some extent the primary route through Kent.-The Ordnance Survey refers to this part of the community as 'Boughton Street' from its association with the A2 although officially the village is Boughton Under Blean. The narrowest part of the Street has a road width of just 16.5 feet, rather less than the width of two buses, and congestion has always been a problem here.

The villages of Boughton and Dunkirk were bypassed in 1976 with a new dual carriageway to the south that also bypassed Canterbury. Long distance through traffic is now mainly carried by the bypass, unless there is an accident or roadworks, when our local roads can be brought to a standstill.

The Street runs west-east towards Dover and within the community other lanes run off to the north and south. These give access to adjacent villages and much of the housing in our community. Most of these lanes are very old, following paths and tracks that have been used for many hundreds of years. By their nature they are narrow, winding and often between steep banks or dense hedgerows. There are blind corners and junctions, and some areas are poorly drained. Few have streetlights and many are flanked by fields, orchards or hop gardens. There is no room for footways; pedestrians share the roads with vehicles, horses and cyclists. It is essentially rural.

The only relatively modern roads are within the housing developments that have been built since the 1960s. These are wider (although not always), better surfaced, better lit and have proper

footways for pedestrians. Almost without exception they link into one of the old lanes to travel in or out of the community.

Most residents must travel out of the villages to work, study, shop, visit the doctor or seek entertainment. They also travel within the villages to study, work, shop, meet friends or to exercise.-The major times of traffic congestion are, as in most communities, between 0800 and 0930 and from 1500 until about 1830 on most weekdays. Much of the traffic comes from cars going to and from Boughton and Dunkirk School to either drop off or collect children. This tends to use The Street and also go into Bull Lane to then drive up the narrow lane to the Village Hall carpark adjacent to the school. Many children walk to school, but others come by car from around the area. This essentially local traffic is encouraged by the narrow lanes, lack of footways and lack of lighting that deters parents from allowing their children to walk to school. We also have traffic within the community travelling to the schools in Selling and Hernhill; there is also traffic from Faversham that passes through going to either of those schools. Outside of this we have the usual commuter traffic.

Heavy demand from residential and commercial vehicular traffic has over-stretched the capacity of our ancient road network.

Parking

Most residents of Boughton and Dunkirk travel by car. A few use bicycles and many walk around within the parishes but the car predominates even for short journeys. Car use brings its own problems with parking and congestion, particularly in the central and western parts of The Street. Very few properties in The Street have any direct access to off-street parking and the 1960s housing development on Horselees Road had none either.

As the difficulties increased though the 1980s, Boughton Parish Council began discussions with KCC about introducing yellow lines to control parking and reduce the congestion. This was introduced after consulting the residents and did help to smooth the traffic flow. However, as car ownership increased the problems have returned. The congestion particularly affects the buses as they pass through the villages as the few passing places are now too far apart and insufficient for the larger cars used today. Now the parking of cars stretches much further up The Street towards Colonels Lane than ever before, particularly at weekends.

As part of the NP process, a survey of residents living near the centre of Boughton was carried out in 2015. A total of 210 questionnaires were distributed, of which 50 were returned (24% response rate.) Detailed results are attached at Appendix 1. In summary, 45% of cars must be parked on the street, as no off-street parking is available. Some 78% of respondents say they would use off-street parking if it were available, but it would need to be close to their home. Security is a major issue for 80% of respondents; they would want the parking to be well-lit, with CCTV and possibly gated entry. Traffic flow through The Street is another major concern for 90% of local residents responding to this survey, as the number of parked cars impedes through traffic.

This NP investigated whether it is possible to provide off street parking for residents in the westerly part of The Street. Residents seemed reluctant however to leave their vehicles very far from their front doors. They are also concerned about the security of their cars in an open car park. On balance,

The NP team concluded that, even if we could find a suitable site or sites for off street parking it would not be sufficiently used by residents without banning all parking, in The Street. This is not an option we consider feasible.

Parking and congestion on the existing road network is a serious constraint on any further large scale development in our community. Any new build properties must have as a minimum at least two on-site parking spaces for each three bedroomed home and an extra space for each further bedroom. Those parking spaces cannot be used for any other purpose.



Heavy Goods Vehicles

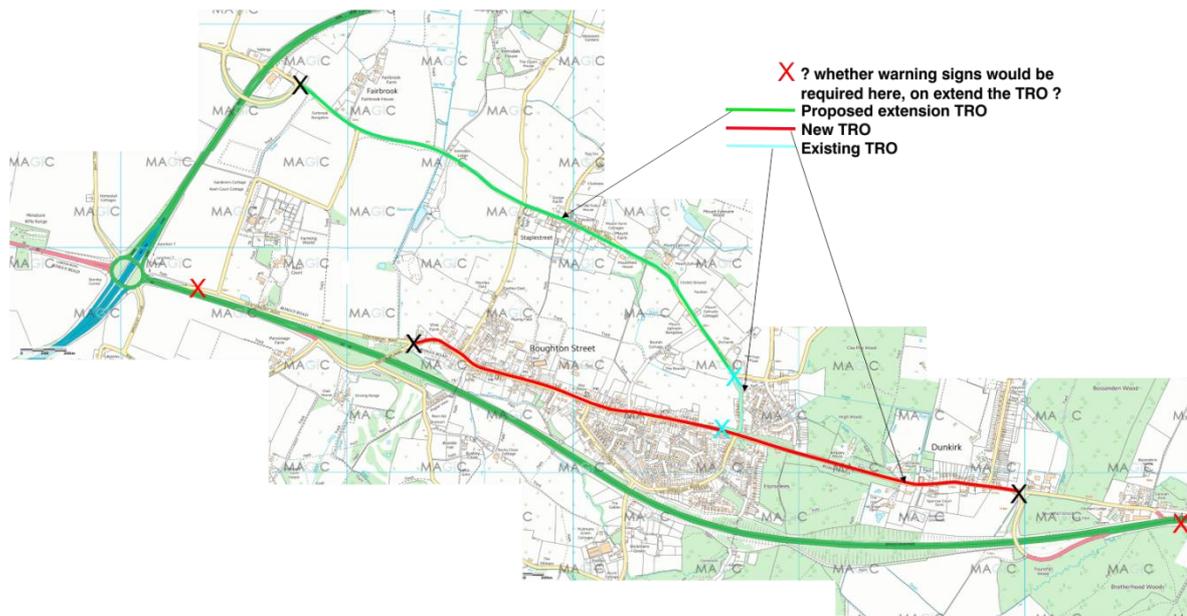
The Boughton bypass removed the vast majority of heavy lorry traffic from the old A2 (“The Street”.) The bypass takes about 5,000 HGV movements each day, as well as about 34,500 other vehicles. Traffic usage of the A2 has grown dramatically over the past 50 years. It was calculated that in 1970 one large articulated lorry drove through The Street every 30 seconds day and night (about 3,000 per 24 hours.)

By 1986 Boughton School children as part of their Domesday Project did a vehicle count over ten hours on a weekday. There were 2,200 vehicles recorded in The Street and 17,520 on the bypass. This included traffic travelling in either direction.

In 2000, the Department of Transport calculated that the total number of vehicles on the bypass heading to Dover averaged just over 27,000 per day, by 2014 this had gone up to more than 34,500. In July 2015 Highways England reversed a policy that had been in place for over a decade to concentrate HGV traffic onto the M20 and reduce it on the M2/A2 route. In the short term it is proposed to spread the traffic load over both main routes. The adoption of the southern route for the new Thames Crossing will also cause a large increase in traffic along the M2/A2 axis in the future.

In 2020 Traffic Regulation Orders were imposed which ban vehicles over 7.5 tonnes from travelling on the whole length of The Street and all of Staplestreet Road as well as Stockers Hill, Canterbury/London Road from the A2 to the Street, and a section of Staple Street, except for public service vehicles and deliveries to local properties. This should prevent local roads being gridlocked when the A2 is closed. See map showing the roads covered.

Proposed 7.5 tonne TROs for Boughton and Dunkirk



Map prepared 23.12.2019 by Jeff Tutt

HGVs delivering or collecting from farms still use our local lanes. This is difficult both for local residents and the drivers themselves. While farmers used smaller lorries or even tractors and trailers twenty years ago to deliver to storage or packing centres in Faversham or Canterbury, nowadays HGVs are used for economic reasons to deliver to facilities outside Kent. Where there are alternative access routes that are more suitable it is possible to apply weight limits to some lanes for environmental reasons; however, this excludes 'loading' which is the reason many of these vehicles are in the lanes in the first place. A greater use of 'Unsuitable For HGVs' signs could reduce the number of large vehicles on the lanes.

The regulations about driving hours for HGV drivers mean that lorries have to stop while drivers have their rest/sleep breaks. There is currently no specific provision for lorries to park up in dedicated secure places whilst drivers take their breaks. Drivers pull over into any layby or roadside space they can find and stay there, usually overnight. Swale has one of the largest numbers of 'on road' overnight lorry parking in Kent. This is a county-wide problem that KCC have been working on for some years; there is still no adequate provision for overnight parking in Kent.

There are no suitable sites within our community; the small lorry park behind Gate Services was closed down some years ago due to the noise of the HGVs and their refrigeration units disturbing residents of the adjacent hotel. After a lengthy campaign Highways England put a series of kerbside poles in place which prevented lorries from parking there. Boughton PC put up a sign at the road entrance to the recreation ground to prevent lorries from parking overnight on the access road and this has been successful. There are still vehicles parking on the slip road from Brenley Corner beside Nash Court.

Bus and Rail Service

Being on the main route from Canterbury to Faversham, the villages have a good bus service. This offers a half-hourly service through most of the day; the service diminishes in the evenings and on Sundays. There is also a service to Whitstable via Hernhill and Dargate to the north of Boughton but this is only two or three times a day and originates in Sittingbourne. Both of these services are in part dependent upon both KCC subsidies and free bus passes for the elderly. It is vital for all rural communities that public transport is kept in place for both environmental and social reasons. In 2018 KCC conducted a study on improving links to these buses from those rural areas where no bus service exists. Lack of funding may limit progress.

There is a good railway service from either Faversham or Canterbury to London, usually half hourly. Trains also stop at Selling which is helpful for those who live in South Street. Access to the railway network could be better if the bus timetables, particularly in the early mornings and later evenings, more closely matched the railway timetables.

Footpaths

Footways/pavements are of variable quality. Most of the footways have reasonable surfaces and within the main pedestrian routes there are plenty of dropped kerbs to allow the easier passage of prams, pushchairs, wheelchairs, scooters and bicycles. In Boughton Street the width may be limited in some parts, particularly down by the old Garden Hotel and the Methodist Chapel. In many places the kerbstones are uneven due to vehicles driving over them and the footway to allow other vehicles to pass.

There are protective railings at the junction with School Lane and others opposite The White Horse. Those near the school are to protect the children, the railings opposite The White Horse are to protect the buildings and to prevent cars from mounting the kerb and then falling onto the footway that is below road level. As much of the narrowest part of The Street is in a Conservation Area and the footways are narrow it is impossible to use fencing or bollards to protect pedestrians.

Few of the north-south roads leaving the line of the old A2 have footways, pedestrians have to walk along the side of the carriageway, often with high banks or walls to their sides. Owing to the restricted width of the roadways there is nothing that can be done to install any sort of footway without making the roadway single track. The lack of street lighting along those roads is historically the choice of many residents who prefer to maintain the rural nature of these lanes.

Boughton and Dunkirk are well served by public footpaths, many of which are well-used. They provide links and short cuts between various parts of the community but also give access to some of the most scenic parts of our countryside. In general, those that cross farmland are kept in good order by the landowners. However, those in the care of the local authority (usually KCC or Swale Borough Council) are now receiving less attention due to financial cutbacks. Most are well signposted, but a small logo could be added to some of them to denote the Walks and Trails for Heritage and Health that we have mapped (see BD11.)

Cyclists

In common with many other rural communities there are an increasing number of recreational cyclists on our roads and woodland trails. Keeping them safe and away from danger is a problem when we have such a narrow and confined roadway system. There is insufficient space for any dedicated cycle lanes. Another hazard is due to the nature of the lanes, with poor sightlines, blind corners, hedges and poor road surfaces contributing to the risks. There is not only a risk to cyclists to consider, but also the risk they can pose to other road users, particularly pedestrians. We know that cycling clubs have routes, particularly around Dunkirk, that incorporate group ascents and fast descents on lanes that are well used by cars, pedestrians and horses. Whilst we have no wish to inhibit this, there must be a degree of caution shown by the cyclists who are also highly vulnerable. We must try to educate all road users, but particularly cyclists, of the dangers.

Signage

Signage is another matter that we believe needs careful review. There are a number of signs that have appeared over the years which may not now be relevant or necessary. Most of the signs have been placed by Highways England or KCC or Swale BC. Some, such as those showing speed limits, are statutory. Others may be informative such as direction signs. Each one must be assessed for its size, position and relevance before any decision may be made about improving, moving or removing it. Also the siting of some signs is such that roadside vegetation may obscure them in the summer months or they are not clearly within the sightline of road users. However we believe that there are some signs that can be removed and all need to be cleaned. We will wish to add a small sign to some of the fingerposts to mark the circular walks on our existing footpaths.