
PRESTWOOD BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Promoting vitality and safety through place-making and lower speeds



For Great Missenden Parish Revitalisation Group

March 2016 Revision 02b

Hamilton-Baillie Associates Ltd

March 2016 Revision 02b

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With support from Buckinghamshire County Council



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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 a community and underpin its identity. For a village 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 straddling busy highways, 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 can also isolate and erode village life, and the vitality and economic resilience of a community depends to a great extent on balancing the pressure from traffic and maintaining a coherent and attractive public realm.

For villages on major traffic routes, such a balance is especially challenging. Prestwood is a striking example. Its position on a bend in the A4128 between High Wycombe and Great Missenden means that the village has to cope with high volumes of through traffic in addition to local journeys. The gradual erosion of public space, especially at the centre of the village, has become a central cause of concern for local residents and businesses. Potential future growth and its implications for traffic volumes add to the challenge. Retaining and enhancing the quality of the village centre in the face of growing traffic has become critical to the relative prosperity of Prestwood.

For this reason, the Great Missenden Parish Revitalisation Group (GMPRG) has taken the initiative, through a local working party (the Prestwood Revitalisation Group), to explore the potential for measures capable of restoring a balance between traffic and village life. The initiative builds on the *Parish Village Design Statement* and the Community Vision project for

Great Missenden and Prestwood, and reflects the strong emphasis placed on the need for a clearer and safer village centre.

Prestwood is not alone in seeking ways to improve the balance between traffic and the qualities of place. Similar initiatives are underway elsewhere in Buckinghamshire and across the UK to find ways to moderate traffic speeds and improve safety and comfort in village centres. *Manual for Streets (2)* of 2011 set out the policy context for balancing the qualities of place with movement in urban centres. Guidance such as *Traffic in Villages: a toolkit for communities* published by Dorset AONB has identified a range of measures to support such objectives. The economic and social benefits generated through revitalized village centres are well established. Prestwood presents a particularly acute example of where such interventions and improvements are necessary.

This brief study is not intended to resolve all the issues associated with traffic in Prestwood. Traffic pressures around the local schools and the wider problems associated with ever busier roads in the surrounding areas are beyond the scope of this report. Nevertheless the focus on Prestwood's centre provides an important starting point and priority for a community determined to retain and enhance the quality of the village. The ideas and principles explored are intended to serve as a catalyst for future public and private sector measures that will support the long-term revitalization of Prestwood's village community.



Background

A detailed study of the A4128 between High Wycombe and Great Missenden was prepared by Jacobs Babbie in 2005. This identified a number of critical shortcomings in the route and its relationship to Prestwood. Few of the recommendations were followed through due to budgetary constraints. Since the study the volume of traffic has risen by around 4% per year, with between 7,000 and 8,500 vehicles per day passing through the village centre. Particularly high flows are recorded during the morning peak, with around 400 vehicles per hour in each direction.

Outside periods of congestion, the speed of vehicles into and through the centre continues to be a major concern. Data from the MVAS units, deployed in the village, record more than half vehicle numbers exceeding 30 mph, and a significant proportion well over 40 mph.

The high speeds are, unsurprisingly, associated with a particular cluster of accident records around the village centre, with around 12 minor injuries and one serious injury between 2008 and 2011. A fatality occurred in the village centre in 2004. The development of a large sheltered housing scheme in the village centre has increased the proportion of more vulnerable pedestrians, and the views gathered for the Village Design Statement indicate a widespread perception of danger associated with the existing arrangements.

In October 2014 the Prestwood Revitalisation Group, with the support of Great Missenden Parish Council and Buckinghamshire County Council, arranged for an initial assessment of the village and its centre by Hamilton-Baillie Associates. At an evening presentation, councillors, stakeholders and landowners were introduced to the principles appropriate to addressing the problems associated with traffic in the centre, and the need to re-establish a clearer identity and low-speed environment in the village. Further work to gather the relevant data, confirm the brief and obtain funding from the Local Area Forum and other sources took place in 2015. Clear objectives were defined for regenerating the village centre, to establish a clear place at the heart of the village, and to create a low-speed environment to meet the needs of traffic, cyclists, and pedestrians of all ages and abilities.



Prestwood Centre from the south



Prestwood Centre from the north



Prestwood - the village

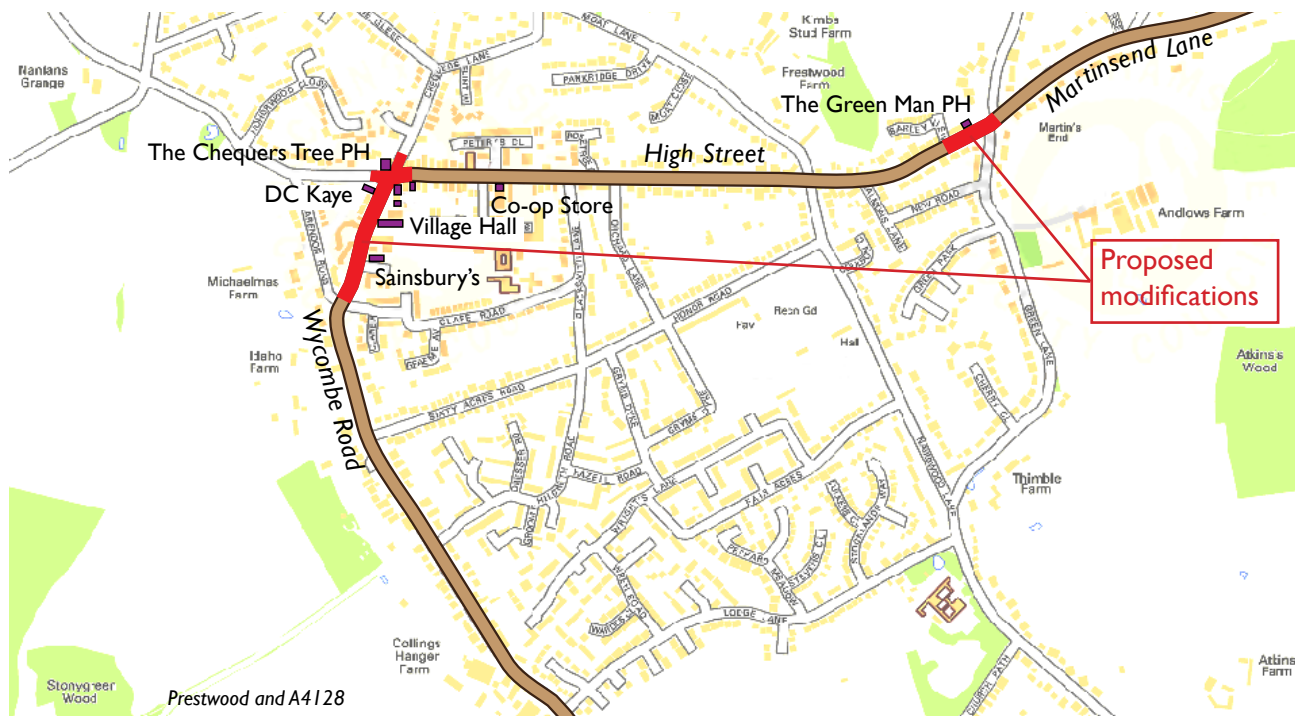
Prestwood lies in the heart of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in an area of gentle rolling farmland and beech woods, on a plateau above the Misbourne Valley. Originally a collection of scattered hamlets and orchards, the arrival of the railway in Great Missenden brought rapid development at the end of the 19th Century. Today Prestwood is home to around 6,000 people, making it the largest village in Buckinghamshire. Future improvements in the rail links to central London and the resulting demand for housing seem likely to spur additional developments in and around the settlement.

Whilst retaining traces of a crossroads village, Prestwood's current form and character is largely determined by the A4128. This takes a sharp change in direction at the centre, where Wycombe Road meets the High Street at the crossroads with Honor End Lane and Chequers Lane. The parish church is located surprisingly far to the south of the village, accentuating a lack of clear settlement definition between Great Kingshill and the edge of Prestwood. Similarly the straggling western edge of Great Missenden along Martinsend Lane is almost contiguous with the eastern end of Prestwood's extended High Street. As a result Prestwood lacks clear edges or gateways that can help signal the boundaries of a village.

The long east-west High Street still reflects the village's history as a collection of hamlets, with small groups of shops and businesses interspersed with housing. It is only at its western end that the main car-park and Co-op supermarket mark the edge of the village centre, which remains focused on the space surrounding the intersection of Wycombe Road with the High Street. A parade of small shops including a post office and butcher line the western edge of the space, adjoining the handsome village hall and extending to a recently developed Sainsbury's supermarket.

The parade of shops and the village hall help to establish one edge of a potential village square. The Chequers Tree Pub frames the northern edge of the space, with a small recently renovated front garden. The western side of the space is defined by a mature tree set in a small area of open space fronting a solicitors' office. Although currently dominated by the sweep of the main road, the shops and pedestrian activity provide the semblance of a village centre.

This study focuses on the village centre and main parade of shops, and also explores ways to mark the eastern approach to Prestwood to help slow westbound traffic entering the village.



Prestwood Centre - Initial observations

Whilst there are many towns and villages that cope with similar volumes of through traffic, Prestwood suffers from unusually high speeds and aggressive driving. Despite being served by the National Cycle Network, there is a notably low level of cycling in and around the village itself. The streets feel particularly uncomfortable and unsafe for bicycles, due to the existing speed environment. On the High Street a zebra crossing has recently been replaced by a signal-controlled crossing, but it is still necessary to deploy a school crossing supervisor (lollipop lady) nearby.

Careful observation of drivers combined with analysis of the highway features suggest that two factors in particular contribute to the higher speeds. Firstly the sweeping geometry of the bend in the main street combined with the wide turning spays into the secondary streets create a large area of unbroken asphalt. The centre lines accentuate the sweeping curve and the linear continuity of the traffic route around the corner of the junction. There is little in the layout of the highway to reflect the various pedestrian routes and informal crossing points generated by the shops and businesses.

Secondly, drivers are given few cues relating to the particular context of the village centre. There is little to interrupt the continuity of the main road at the start of the shopping area, either on Wycombe Road from the south, or at the western end of the High Street. The lack of visual connection between street and surrounding shops is not helped by the density and layout of parked cars, which partly shield the drivers' view of the shop fronts. The buildings, carriageways, footways and open spaces that form the focal point of the village have no unifying features to provide a recognizable sense of place. As a result, it is the sweeping bend in the main road that dominates the drivers' perception of Prestwood's centre. There is no village heart to modify driver behaviour.



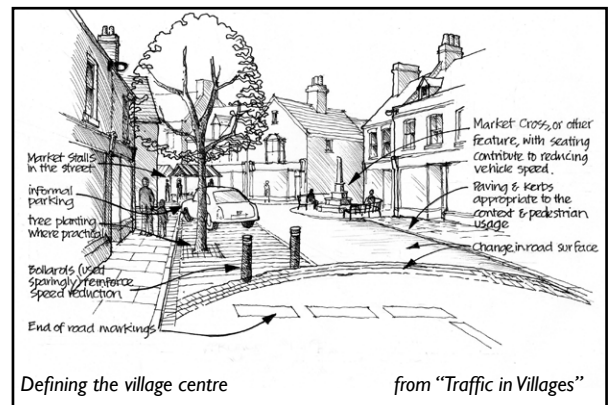
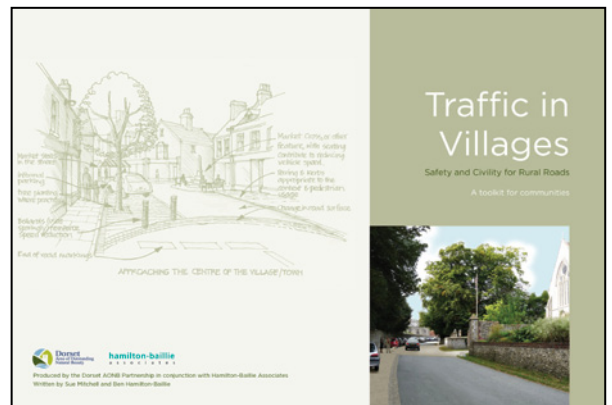
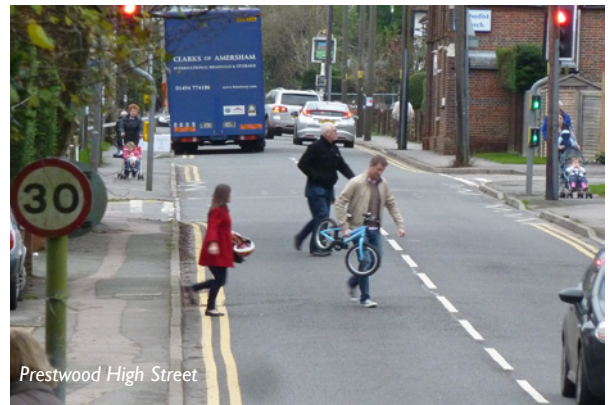
Prestwood Centre - The case for change

The Jacobs Babbie report highlighted several places in Prestwood where the existing arrangement of the A4128 conflicts with the urban context of the village. However it also notes that the limited carriageway widths of the extended High Street and Wycombe Road of between 6.2 and 6.4 metres severely constrains the options for substantial change throughout the built-up area. In practice the likely budget limitations would preclude any comprehensive alterations to the route through Prestwood in anything but the very long-term. The need for carefully targeted investment at the most effective location is therefore logical.

Traffic in Villages, the guidance produced by Dorset, based on research and case studies over a number of years, identifies the important effect of a clearly defined village centre on the speed and responses of drivers. There appear to be significant benefits in reduced impact of passing traffic where a centre provides some sense of arrival, and a break point in the continuity of the route. In many villages a church square or market place serves this purpose, helping to slow the pace to match the lower-speed context.

Prestwood currently lacks such an asset. Although the village hall, the supermarkets, car park, the pub and the parade of shops provide some of the ingredients, there is nothing that brings together the individual elements into a coherent, recognizable space. They are divided one from another by a linear carriageway that prompts little recognition of the purpose of its surroundings or a sense of arrival.

Investment focused on Prestwood's centre makes sense as a starting point for revitalising the village. A slower environment is likely to increase footfall for the local shops and businesses by creating a more attractive public space. This in turn will support and spur further local investment, helping to consolidate the centre and build on the recent refurbishment of the Chequers Tree Pub. Enhancing the public realm of the village centre is likely to maximise the effectiveness of such changes.



Design constraints

Any proposals to consolidate the centre of Prestwood need to take account of a number of factors that limit the options for change. Above all, the space has to continue to provide for the safe movement of large numbers of vehicles in both directions and to allow access to the minor village roads of Honor End Lane and Chequers Lane. Lower speeds create opportunities for tighter dimensions, but nevertheless the options for any radical realignment of the existing carriageways are limited. Existing footways are relatively narrow, and there is only a small amount of land outside the immediate highway in public ownership.

The second significant constraint springs from the desire to maintain provision of short-term parking around the shops and businesses. The land immediately fronting the shops is privately owned, and although there is welcome support for public realm investment, there is limited wish to reduce parking numbers. A revised arrangement to rationalise the layout may be possible, but would depend on local agreement. Some additional parking provision off Honor End Lane may be possible, and would benefit from easier and more direct crossing of the main road. But any proposals to create a village square need to take account of the continuing use of much of the eastern side of the space for cars.

Although the exact location of underground utilities is unknown at this stage, it is likely that a location such as this intersection of four streets will accommodate significant numbers of service runs. This will constrain the siting of any trees and will have a bearing on surface works and kerb realignments. Whilst such limitations can be worked around, they are factors which need to be considered.

Works to existing busy highways are inevitably expensive, even where relatively modest material changes are proposed. Any measures will be constrained by continuing public sector budgetary limitations, and the likely need to phase implementation. In common with many current public realm schemes, any proposals will increasingly depend on a combination of developer contributions and complex private, public and voluntary sector funding.



Design principles

The revitalisation of Prestwood's village centre requires a set of combined measures to modify the response of drivers to their surroundings. In particular this means reductions in speeds, whilst maintaining steady vehicle flows to cope with traffic movement. Conventional traffic calming measures such as speed humps and chicanes are unlikely to help achieve these objectives. Amendments to the current 30 mph speed limit are also unlikely to be effective on their own. The appropriate change in speeds and driver expectations can be achieved by introducing a number of more subtle modifications to the streetscape known to slow traffic and improve safety.

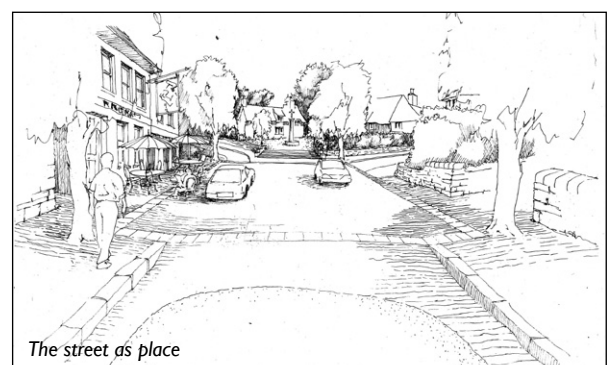
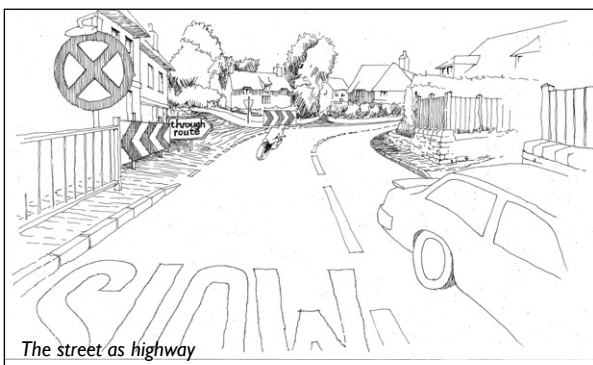
The first such change relies on creating a clear point of transition between the faster approaching highways and the context of the village centre. A distinctive change in scale and street characteristics on the boundaries of the village centre helps alert drivers to the change in circumstances. For an extended village such as Prestwood, a number of such transitions may be appropriate. For this initiative, gateways that help define the immediate boundaries of the village centre will be helpful, alongside minor modifications at the village edges.



Secondly, lower speeds can be fostered by reducing the apparent widths of carriageways. This can be achieved through modifying verge and kerb details. The use of central median strips to divide carriageways, where widths permit, can also help.

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 also be helpful. 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.

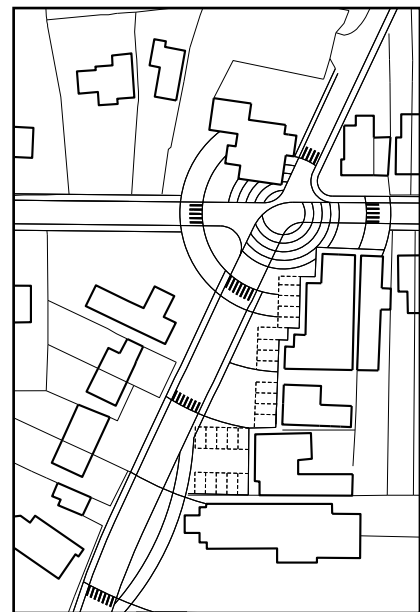
Above all, the extent to which a town centre is perceived as a place in its own right, rather than a mere stretch of highway, influences drivers' speed and expectations. Such place-making is key to achieving more balanced, low-speed streetscapes. Lower speeds in turn enhance the potential for establishing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



Design development

Initial exploration of possible options for the centre of Prestwood build on ways to modify the existing sweeping bend in the A4128 to create a distinctive place at the heart of the village. These aimed to re-connect the shops, parking, pub and open space in ways to minimise the barrier effect of the main traffic route, whilst allowing for sufficient low speed flows. Traffic signals were rejected due to their adverse effect on speeds and congestion. A pair of linked roundabouts had some merit, but did little to establish a single coherent space. A few of the many options are illustrated below.

The position and presence of the renovated pub provides a natural focus for the southern approach, but is less effective as a marker from the east. Striking a balance between the four arms of the junction, whilst maintaining the priority for the main route requires a careful balance. A number of alternative ways to minimise the barrier effect of car parking were explored, together with measures to visually link the streetscape more clearly with the surrounding buildings and shops, and to reflect typical pedestrian movement patterns. The overall car parking space was broadly maintained.



Pair of linked small roundels

This option builds on an earlier suggestion put forward by the Prestwood Revitalisation Group and would involve a double roundel arrangement to suggest patterns of flow similar to a roundabout. It would be effective in slowing traffic, and ease entry from the side roads, although it generates some delays on the main route. Wycombe Road is slightly realigned westward creating more space on the corner. Such an approach creates less of a clear sense of place, and would generate higher maintenance costs.

Framed 'Checker Board' square

The option for creating a strong and distinctive space based on an interpretation of a chess board offered an approach to unifying the space. The design has associations with checkers (or "chequers") before the correct derivation was established by the new owners of the pub. The option would require additional definition for kerbs etc., and would lead to higher maintenance costs. It was also felt to be too forced and urban in approach for the Chilterns AONB context.

Radiating paving place-making

This option explored the option of maintaining existing kerb alignments as existing, and creating a simple radiating paving pattern to more clearly link the pub with the parade of shops. Additional stronger crossings and paving were extended to a wider area, and a number of alternative car parking arrangements were explored. Again it was agreed that the design was too dependent on adjoining landowners and would require paving to be maintained under the most heavily trafficked areas,

Outline proposals for Prestwood Centre



Proposed modifications - the southern approach

The revitalisation strategy for Prestwood is rightly focused on re-establishing and strengthening a village centre. This requires measures at a number of levels in order to change expectations and traffic speeds in both the centre itself, and on the main approaches. The minor streets intersecting at the centre, Honor End Lane and Chequers Lane, carry sufficiently low volumes at moderate speeds to require less attention. The approach from the east, along High Street, benefits from the presence of the main car park, the Co-Op supermarket and the occasional small shop to help modify speeds. By contrast, the Wycombe Road approach from the south has a faster feel, with the more set-back buildings having less influence on traffic and especially incoming north-bound drivers.

For this reason we would recommend a sequence of measures to help redefine the southern edge of Prestwood's centre and to highlight key transition points and buildings. The first of these is proposed just north of the junction of Wycombe Road with Clare Road and Clarendon Road, the point at which the centre first comes into sight. Alternative gateways further south, such as at Sixty Acres Road or at Lodge Lane junction are too remote from the village core. Minor realignment of the kerb combined with additional trees and a more clearly highlighted crossing help to reinforce the change in scale and boundary of the centre. Road markings should be removed from this point inwards.



Existing and proposed arrangement for the southern gateway at Clare Road



Proposed modifications - the southern approach

A second transition point is proposed opposite the new Sainsbury's store, at the junction with Pepys Drive, marking the start of the retail area and reinforcing the slower context of the shopping area. An applied surface treatment combining the forecourt and street would highlight the shop front, and also emphasize an important informal crossing point from Giles Gate. Such treatment is compatible with the existing Sainsbury's frontage parking.

Thirdly, the elegant frontage of the 1920's Village Hall could similarly help articulate the approach to the main parade and heart of Prestwood. A surface treatment to unite the building, its car

park, and the adjacent bus stop could define the core area, and further slow traffic approaching the busy shops and parking area and the existing zebra crossing.

Throughout the village centre, we recommend use of simple inserted paving lines to link the roadway with the parking area, serving as concentric reflections of the centre. These would be laid between a zone fronting the shops and the western pavement edge, helping to break down the road's linearity, and reinforcing the zebra crossing and car park entrance. The paving can continue regardless of the car parking arrangements.



Existing and proposed arrangement opposite the village hall on Wycombe Road



Proposed modifications - the eastern approach

The long stretch of the High Street and Martinsend Lane lacks a sufficient concentration of pedestrian activity until its extreme western end, and there are fewer opportunities for place-making along its length. The village entry itself is marked by the village sign just east of the Green Man pub and the junction with Green Lane. It would be helpful to reinforce the presence of the pub and its garden as a transition point. Minor modifications to the kerbs and reducing the apparent width of the street to form a break in the alignment and linear continuity could be combined with carefully located trees and planting to achieve this transition. The existing bus stops can be integrated with the measures. It would also present an opportunity to modify the wide sweep of the junction with Green Lane and to give stronger emphasis to the pedestrian route along Martinsend Lane to discourage traffic, especially heavy vehicles, from using Green Lane as a cut through.



Existing and proposed arrangement for the eastern entry by The Green Man



Proposed modifications - the eastern approach

Towards the western end of the High Street, the Co-op, car park, pelican crossing and small bakery combine to form a focus of activity, but this is a little too far from the Chequers Tree junction to act as a transitional point. Some limited on-street parking helps to narrow the carriageway and slow the approach speeds. However the critical transition into the village centre itself is the point where the footway widens out opposite the chemist and health shop, just east of the junction. This is where lower speeds are essential and frequent informal pedestrian crossings take place. For this reason we would recommend particular measures to reinforce this point of entry through a change of alignment and materials.



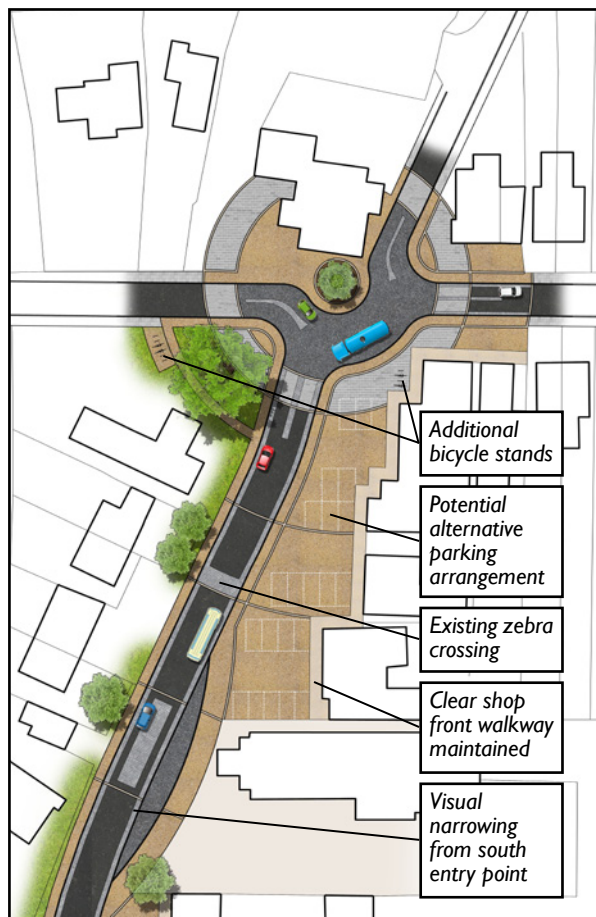
Existing and proposed arrangement for the eastern entry to the centre



Proposed measures - Prestwood Village Centre

The creation of a new village centre requires a number of combined measures to transform a mere bend in a main road into a distinctive, low-speed place. At the same time the space has to allow for continuing flows of vehicles efficiently and safely. The intersection of streets, and the focal point outside the pub also requires a clearer and more visible relationship with the other shops and businesses in Chequers Parade. A combination of measures is proposed to help achieve this, and to bring together the various buildings and features in the centre to form a coherent and legible focal point.

The first measure involves a realignment of the carriageway to create a gentle double-bend with just sufficient width to allow for low-speed manoeuvring by buses and large vehicles. A minor realignment on the southern approach angles Wycombe Road slightly towards the pub, creating a little more space on the Parade. The junctions with Honor End Lane and Chequers Lane would be somewhat tightened and realigned.



Such a rearrangement creates an opportunity for a new element, such as a fine specimen tree, perhaps a *sorbus torminalis*, at the point of convergence of the two main routes into Prestwood. Should a tree not be possible due to underground services or other constraints, a vertical element such as a distinctive lamp, pub sign or sculpture could serve the same role. The tree provides a focal point to both main approaches, and would play an important part in returning a strong sense of place to the intersection. It could also benefit the frontage of the pub, helping to define and protect the small front terrace.

A circular paving pattern, based on the tree at its centre, helps establish the place qualities of the village “square”. Such a pattern would combine carriageway, footways and area of private car parking (by agreement) to create a single, coherent area. Its outer diameter reflects the typical crossing points, such as between the health centre and chemist, to give greater emphasis to pedestrian movement. To the south, the Village Hall’s enhanced frontage marks the boundary of the main Parade. Simple lines of radiating paving connect street and shops, and maintain the focus on the centre point of the village. A broad, low kerb would be maintained with tactile surfacing and additional tactile paving to identify the zebra and informal crossing points.

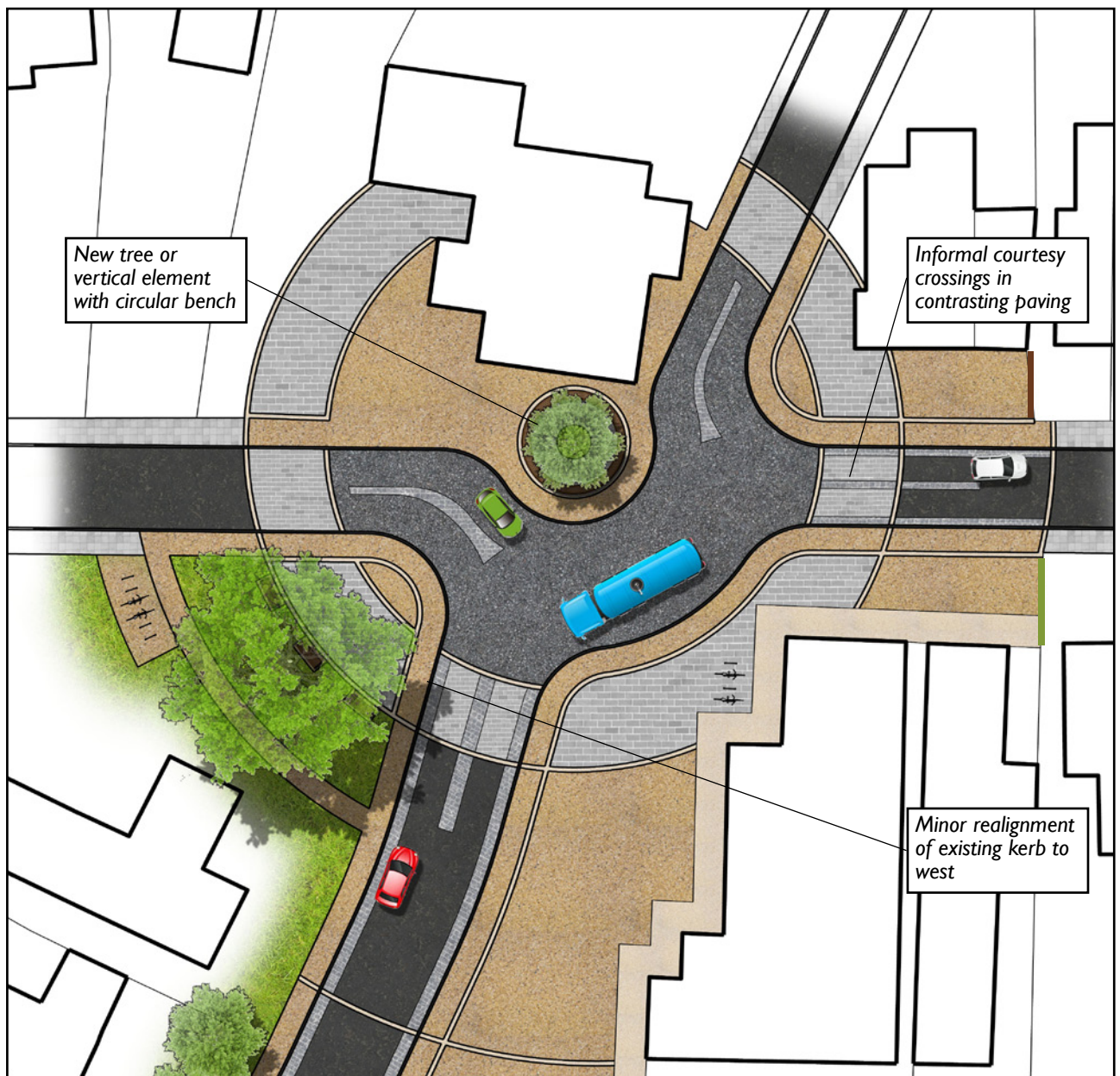
The existing tree on the south-western perimeter plays an important role in the new arrangement. The relationship between the existing tree and a new vertical element helps define the space. Ideally the village centre could be framed by a third such feature outside the post office, but car parking demands and the location of underground services may preclude this option.

It should be possible to introduce the modifications without affecting the number of overall car parking spaces. However, it would be very beneficial to lose one space from the northern end of the car park, a space that currently screens the view to the Post Office door. A revised car parking arrangement, defined by inset studs, could be discussed with the landowner and traders to maintain a balance between visibility and pedestrian access to the shops, and the need for short-term spaces.

Proposed measures - Chequers Place

Further careful checking of vehicle “tracking” lines will be necessary to finalise the precise kerb alignments to ensure that sufficient (but not excessive) carriageway space is available. The geometry of the junction is intended to maintain low speeds and maximise driver awareness of their surroundings, whilst permitting smooth traffic flows. Low kerbs, picked out in a contrasting material, define the carriageways with continuous footways around the space. The insertion of visual narrowing and flush median strips highlight the informal pedestrian crossing points and entry / exit points to the junction.

The proposed arrangement places particular emphasis on the recently renovated “Chequers Tree” pub and its forecourt. This offers the opportunity for a commercially beneficial relationship between the village community, the highway authority and local businesses to maximise the attractiveness of Prestwood’s centre and to maintain a co-ordinated approach to its management. For example, we would strongly recommend that the new tree be informally illuminated to maximise its role as a focal point on the main approaches, perhaps with seating around its base.



Chequers Place - Sketch proposals

A number of different combinations of materials and street details will be possible. The essential change involves a careful realignment of the crossroads at the heart of Prestwood, intended to slow traffic speeds and to re-establish an immediately recognizable village centre - one with a distinctive landmark with its own unique identity and sense of place. The realignment is designed to allow vehicles to continue through Prestwood, but with drivers fully conscious of the need for greater care in the busy pedestrian context of the High Street and Chequers Parade. The circular paving surrounding the junction gives much greater prominence to the places where pedestrians typically cross between doctor's surgery and chemist, and between the shops and Honor End Lane. Bicycle parking can be included on both sides of Wycombe Road, along with additional benches under both the existing and new tree.



The existing sweeping bend at the centre of the village



Typical pedestrian crossing points across the junction



Implementation, phasing and costs

Detailed topographical and underground surveys will be required before proposals are taken forward. Further discussions with the highway authority will be required, and we would recommend a “Quality Audit” (as recommended in *Manual for Streets 2*) to assess all implications of the scheme including safety and practicalities. Participation and engagement with interested parties will be required, especially with the owners and managers of the pub, local landowners and traders.

If maximum benefit and longevity is to be achieved from the cost and disruption involved in any scheme, we would recommend the use of carefully specified deep granite for the circular ring at the heavily trafficked village centre. However, it would be possible to minimise short-term costs through the use of applied surface materials, although these would have more limited lifespans.

As much as 25% of streetworks costs can be absorbed by the working limitations and measures required if the road needs to remain operational during construction. Although disruptive and inconvenient in the short term, diverting traffic can significantly shorten time required and reduce costs. The street network in Prestwood does offer potential alternative routes, such as Lodge Lane and Green Lane. None are ideal, and it may be necessary to introduce measures to discourage such diversions once works are complete. However it would make sense to take advantage of temporary traffic diversions to carry out as much of the work in the village centre and thus keep costs and the extent of disruption to the minimum.

Costs will be significantly dependent on ground conditions and choice of materials. However a square metre cost of around £260 for the core central trafficked area, and around £185 for secondary areas, is typical for such schemes. Allowing 700 m² for the centre, and 600 m² for secondary areas would suggest a capital budget in the region of £290,000 for an overall scheme. Such figures should not be taken as more than a very initial estimate, since many variables need to be taken into consideration. It is likely that any scheme would be co-ordinated with planned maintenance programmes such as highway resurfacing which would reduce additional costs.



Granite blocks for maximum traffic loading - Poynton



Applied resin-bonded surfacing and contrasting kerb



Low cost framed asphalt paving

Prestwood Centre - The next steps

This initial analysis and outline proposals represent merely the first stage in a long journey. A community revitalisation scheme of this nature calls for a thorough programme for local public engagement and participation. The scheme is intended to underpin a long-term vision for Prestwood as a thriving and growing village. Much refinement and modifications will be required, especially in partnership with Transport for Buckinghamshire as highway authority. The interests of local businesses and private investors are key to such a scheme to maximise the economic and social benefits that a regenerated village centre can bring.

Although the circumstances for Prestwood are unique, there are benefits to be gained from learning from precedents. These can range from relatively simple rural schemes that combine speed reduction with place-making. One example is West Meon in Hampshire, where speeds on the A32 were reduced and a village centre re-established. At a more ambitious level, schemes such as the regeneration of Poynton in Cheshire demonstrates the potential for urban regeneration and place-making despite very heavy through traffic. Visits and further analysis to such examples can build up understanding and knowledge, and afford valuable lessons for a vision such as Prestwood's.

Changes to the public realm are not easy. Streetscape alterations are disruptive, expensive and almost always controversial. A community has to undergo many months of debate and persuasion in order to establish sufficient consensus to take a project forward, and to withstand the discomfort and inconvenience of construction works. Such consensus building requires patient engagement at both a local and county level to establish agreements on the key principles behind the approach. This report forms a basis for exploring the vision further, and modifying the details in light of local responses, opportunities, and ever-changing circumstances. We would recommend a programme of events and local meetings to initiate this critical engagement process.



Extensive local engagement will be required to develop the scheme



Low cost speed reduction and place-making - West Meon



Low speed village centre with heavy traffic - Poynton

Conclusions

Prestwood is in need of investment in its public realm. A village of its size and potential significance in a growing economy requires a clear vision to guide future public and private investment. Such a vision builds on the critical advantage to be gained from establishing a distinctive and attractive village centre, as a coherent focal point for trade, interaction and community activity.

Creating such a centre is entirely compatible with the need to allow continuing flows of traffic. Indeed most town centres are built around the main crossroads and intersection of converging routes. The space fronting the Chequers Tree pub is the logical location for Prestwood's centre. But to create such a space requires a better balance to be struck between the movement of traffic and the quality of place. The outline proposals indicate that this can be achieved without loss of capacity or safety for through-traffic, and is consistent with the current status of the A4128.

Redefining a public space is itself key to addressing the traffic issues impacting Prestwood. The shift from a sweeping bend to a recognizable place with its own identity will help lower speeds and significantly improve pedestrian links. Highlighting the presence of key shops and buildings and their relationship to passing traffic is likewise central to lowering speeds and promoting trade. Defining a distinctive place will greatly enhance the location of the pub, as well as improving the environment for local shops and businesses.

The low-key approach to traffic calming and the emphasis on the existing features of Prestwood is entirely consistent with the management plan and highways guidance of the Chilterns AONB. A new centre will reduce the impact of the main through route on Prestwood, creating a more pedestrian and bicycle-friendly lower speed environment and attractive public realm that is increasingly essential to the revitalisation and long-term future of this important village.

