

ALLER TRAFFIC REPORT AND CALMING MEASURES RESEARCH

Compiled by Emma Dunton and Karen Pollock August 2023

Statement and Purpose:

In response to the traffic item being on the Parish Council Agenda in November 2022 a number of Aller parishioners attended the meeting to express their concerns regarding the A372 that runs through the village. It was decided during this meeting that the Parish Council would look further into the issues raised and explore what measures could be taken to mitigate the situation. The Parish Council also committed to considering contributing funds towards traffic calming measures. The Council currently covers the cost for the shared use of a Speed Indication Device (SIDS) which is erected on a part-time basis. Both District Councillors, Richard Wilkins and Mike Stanton, who were in attendance when these discussions took place, both expressed their support of Aller Parish finding solutions to alleviate the situation, including exploring introducing a 20 MPH zone as one possibility.

Aller Parish Council has a resolve to try and improve the situation with regards to traffic through the village and is committed to ensuring others become committed. It is important to note that the Parish Council is dependent on other authorities and organisations to help with this resolve. The purpose of this report is to try and gather the support of others, including the official bodies required, through presenting as much information and context to address the concerns as far is possible.

Historically the A372 road that runs straight through Aller village has been subject to ongoing discussion and concern to the villagers of Aller for many years. In particular, the section between Ridley Hill and the Old Pound Inn Public House, due to the narrowness of the road and pavement on this section and the impact on pedestrians and buildings. The issues fall broadly into three categories of Speed, Width and Use of Road - though the issues are all inextricably intertwined.

This report is in response to the discussions that took place in November 2022 with the following aims: to outline the history of the traffic in Aller; the changing circumstances and the environmental context of the A372 within the area of the Aller village; to outline issues raised by parishioners; to present the most recent traffic statistics gathered; to reference recent traffic incidents that have caused concerns; to make recommendations for further actions by the Parish Council and suggest possible measures where possible and appropriate.

This investigation is led by Parish Council Member Emma Dunton, with the help of Karen Pollock, resident on Ridley Hill section - previously an ecologist with Natural England, with contribution of some data from Judith Bailey who leads the Community Speed Watch team. Several parishioners who live along the Ridley Hill road section of the village have been consulted and contributed, as well as parishioners further along the route of the road within the village.

This report is by no means exhaustive, nor definitive. It is expected to be expanded upon as is necessary, and as more information is gathered.

Background Information + Changing Circumstances

Historical context:

In 2003 it was recognised that the road through the village needed pavements in order to safeguard pedestrians as there wasn't a continuous pathway. Some pavements were created which improved things marginally. But currently, the pavements are not continuous and pedestrians need to cross the road in several places in order to walk through the village to the school bus-stop, to the pub, the village hall, the church or the swimming pool.

Changes since 2003

Those marginal improvements are now no longer giving the desired protection because since 2003 most vehicles, including HGV's, cars and vans, have increased in width, length, weight and height. Families in Lilac Cottage, the Old Stores and Vale View at the Ridley Hill end of the road have particularly expressed concerns about this matter including children walking to the bus-stop and elderly persons have expressed fear of walking down the narrow pavement to get to the village. There have been repeated issues with buildings, walls and other property being hit (see below for more detail).

There is a perceived increase in traffic on this village road, and in particular vans and HGV's, since the bridges on the A372 outside Othery (at the seven bends) were strengthened around 20 years ago and two new culverts were installed at Bere Wall in 2016 as part of a flood protection programme.

General Environmental Context of Aller village and Environs to the A372

The A372 runs through several important areas of nature conservation interest. On the east of the A372 between Bere and Coombe there are several Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's) and on the west side there is a Special Protection Area for Birds (International Designation) and SSSIs, Southlake Moor and King's Sedgemoor. There are also County Wildlife Sites for birds, mammals, ditches and wetland species. The local wildlife sites include ditches which support many unusual and rare water plants and invertebrates, including dragonflies, water beetles and snails. Ditch margins are used as feeding ground for birds especially when they have chicks.

Skylarks, linnets, lapwings, fieldfare and redwing, all recorded in this area and village, are red listed species which means that their numbers have fallen by over 50% in the last 25 years. Also regularly recorded on Aller Hill is the brown hare, which, together with skylarks and linnets are Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Species which means that there are special plans for their conservation.

These birds and brown hares are also protected under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006).

There are several bat roosts in the village, these are all protected species and also their habitats.

These are just some of the vulnerable species in this area and that are watched by local people with great enjoyment. Other wildlife using the hill includes, cranes, buzzards, starlings and many songbirds which are also declining in numbers. The Aller Court farm has played an important role in the re-introduction of the Cranes, generating huge interest locally and countrywide. They regularly forage on the fields and ditches.

Why does this matter in this context?

- Traffic produces nitrogen deposition enriching pasture, rivers and ditches which is detrimental to the local habitats and species. The slower traffic travels the less of this harmful pollution is produced.
- Excessive speeding HGVs, vans and cars are more likely hit birds and animals along the road, and the narrowness of the road creates danger to both animals and humans.
- Additionally, in the current growing awareness and concern for well-being and health within all sectors of rural communities, including children and elderly persons, improving accessibility of amenities in the village (the village hall, the pub, the church, the bus-stop) for social and practical welfare are viewed as a priority.
- Climate change, a global concern, is as just as important an issue locally as nationally, therefore encouraging alternative modes of movement and transport such as cycling, walking, taking public transport and by making these alternatives as accessible and easy as possible is a priority.

Highlighted Current Issues and Concerns:

Width of Ridley Hill Road and vehicles

The width of the road from Vale View to the Old Pound Inn varies from 5 metres to 6.5 metres from Vale View to the Old Pound Inn (see attached maps below)

For context the width of an average HGV is 2.6 metres + wing mirrors, the width of a typical white van is 1.7 metres + wing mirrors which is particularly pertinent as there are on average 58 vans passing through the village an hour at peak times. The average size of a car 1.821 meters not including wing mirrors, and a 4x4 car average is 1.96. This means that most vehicles that pass through the village if they meet at certain points on this part of the road exceed the road width.

The main current concerns are from a village pedestrians and traffic are as follows:

- Pedestrians feeling unsafe and concerns about children walking to the bus-stop to take the bus to school, as well as less agile and fit elderly persons walking on narrow pavements when HGVs and cars are travelling at current speed.

- Frequent mounting of the pavement at Ridley Hill making it unsafe for pedestrians – this is illegal and a traffic violation.
- Noise pollution from vehicles creating loud bangs when they are disembarking the pavements.
- Specific issues with vehicles and property being hit and damaged by other vehicles.

Speed of Traffic

- Linked to the above issue of larger vehicles driving through the village at 30mph, they need to suddenly brake and/or mount pavement in order to enable to pass when they meet at the narrower sections of the road.
- Safe places to cross the road are limited – particular concern at Ridley Hill, the pub and swimming pool at The Manor and Village Hall when cars are driving at 30 mph.
- Lack of visibility when crossing the road at several point throughout the village increases the issue when vehicles are driving at 30 mph.
- Because of the shape of the hill – traffic approaching from the North cannot see what is coming up the hill from the Old Pound Inn.
- The 30 mph speed limit is too fast throughout the village and has caused damage to property, vehicles and is dangerous.

Recent Accidents and Events in Ridley Hill area of A372

Ridley Hill:

Hunters Moon – the oldest house in the village - has been hit and damaged 5 times since 2008:

2023 – lorry mounted pavement, broke guttering and roof tiles along the front of the property. This was officially reported to Somerset Traffic (Highways)

2019 – Lorry mounted pavement, pulled the main power cable off the wall, damaged guttering and roof tiles

2011 – Hay lorry mounted pavement pulled 3 rows of roof tiles and all the guttering off

2008 – Car spun off the Chapel wall wrote off a van, smashed a fence of which two posts went through the living room window and one through the front door. By complete chance nobody was hurt.

Environmental consideration: There has been a maternity roost of pipistrelle bats, a protected species, roosting in the Hunter's Moon roof for many years, up to 170 females rearing their young. The repeated disturbance of mending the roof has caused this population to drop off completely and unlikely to return unfortunately.

In 2022, one night a car lost control outside Beggar's Acre on Ridley Hill, hit the wall, and ended up balanced on the Mayfield House's wall – six feet above their driveway where their cars were damaged and the wall collapsed.

There are other examples of cars losing control on the first bend into Aller village on the Ridley Hill end opposite the Vale View row of houses.

Several pedestrians have reported being hit by wing mirrors and umbrellas ripped away whilst walking down the Ridley Hill pavement from Hunter’s Moon to the pub. Drivers regularly lose their mirrors from collision between cars and return to pick them up.

Incident examples: High Street at Langport end of village

Parked cars on the High Street outside Blue Shutters and The Pottery have been damaged due to speed of traffic and vehicles unable to slow down quickly enough to give way appropriately.

There has been a recent incident of a wall being destroyed opposite the Seed Factory and also a horse box coming off the road close to Lower Barn.

2014, 2015 + 2018 incidents reported by Ayesha Holloway on High Street:

‘On the high street opposite the 30mph sign at Russ Farm House. Two significant incidents affecting her car whilst parked during our 12 years of living here. Both incidents have been where motorists have driven into the back of the vehicle, the first was hit hard enough to lodge the car against the high curb causing approx £19k worth of damage and the second was from a commercial vehicle again hitting the back of the parked car and approx £14k of damage. The length of the car has been scratched on a separate occasion where a vehicle travelling in the opposite direction has come onto contact with parked car.’

Traffic Statistics for Aller Village*

*taken from Community Speed Watch and other timed observations:

Below are the figures on amount of vehicles passing through the village from the Community Speed Watch based on 7 sessions in 2023, giving an average of 392 vehicles an hour. There are usually between 10 - 15 speeders in each session.

16/5/23 538
 20/5/23 330
 26/5/23 377

1/6/23 0745-0845 459
 10/6/23 1030-1130 296
 16/6/23 1800-1900 283
 26/6/23 0745-0845 469

Levels of Traffic: Different Vehicles and Pavement Mounting

2023 Ridley	Thursday 12 July 07.40 – 08.40	Wednesday 26 July 08.10 – 09.10	Thursday 27 July 16.20 – 17.20	Monday 31 July 07.40 – 08.40
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Small Lorry +/- Trailer	4	8	6	13
HGV/Lorry	13	19	7	6
Huge HGV	5	12	2	5
Van	52	48	65	68
Motor Bikes	3	0	2	1
Bicycle	1	0	0	0
Pedestrians	3	1	8*	3
Bus	1	1	2	1
Cars/HGV/Vans mounting the pavement	3	8	9	1

*4 persons showed visible unease for their safety when the HGV passed the narrow pavement.

During one survey of weight of traffic on one day in the village there are approximately **7 vehicles a minute passing through during peak times**, this was undertaken during school holidays so is likely an under-estimation.

On average vehicles **mounting the pavement** (based on the timed observations above) were **5.25 times an hour**.

What are the Potential Calming Measures?

The measures below are not compiled by a professional traffic person (though this undertaking is one of the recommendations), but based on ideas from the parishioners.

To address the two key areas of speed and width of the road to increase safety and well-being for pedestrians, cyclists and drivers alike some of the ideas that might be considered are:

- Permanent Speed Indicator Devices (SIDS) at each end of the village (types, prices and cost of installation information to be gathered). The Chair and Deputy Chair of Aller Parish Council recently attended the Local Council Network where several Parishes reported on the positive effect of installing permanent SIDS. It was also emphasised that speeding and other traffic issues have been identified as key priorities for the network and Somerset Council.
- Grey Box that records repeat offenders and send this information to the police for follow up.
- 20 MPH – to research what is required in order to implement a 20 mph zone through the whole or part of the village e.g. undertake a 20 mph survey of the villagers and

get examples of the impact on local villages where a 20 mph zone has been introduced (Monkton Elms + Somerton)

- Change speed of vehicles approaching Aller from the North earlier e.g. a gradual slowing of traffic from 60 to 50 to 40 or similar could be accompanied by physical calming measures such as speed bumps outside of the village (in a place where it doesn't not create noise pollution for the nearby houses)
- Earlier signage to warn traffic to slow down sooner (connected to the point above)
- All HGV's being banned from this part of the A372 unless for local purposes which would require a permit. Or certain sizes of HGV being banned from this part of the A372 unless for local purposes which would require a permit. It is worth noting that this measure would be considered to have both an economic and environmental impact, there would be resistance and likely to be difficult to implement – as is shown by Langport's struggles to implement on the A358. However, this does not mean it shouldn't be considered.
- Traffic Lights, including intelligent devices that only function when and where needed e.g. when an HGV has arrived at one end of the road. For Information: 'Smart traffic lights or Intelligent traffic lights are a vehicle traffic control system that combines traditional traffic lights with an array of sensors and artificial intelligence to intelligently route vehicle and pedestrian traffic. They can form part of a bigger intelligent transport system.' This would need expert advice.
- Give-way sections and Right of Way (arrowed) or other methods to allow only one vehicles to pass certain sections at a time e.g. Warning signage strengthened to show right of way between Ridley Hill and the Old Pound Inn or at narrowest point an indication of where vehicles should wait and who has right of way.
- Zebra Crossing/s
- One way intelligent traffic light scheme between the northern edge of the village and the village hall. There are traffic lights that can be programmed to only go red when certain situations are impending e.g. only when wide vehicles are approaching.

Recommendations to the Parish Council for September 2023 meeting:

- Subject to research on costings to agree in principle the process to pay for and install permanent SIDS at both ends of the village as soon as possible. It is recommended that SIDS costings and implementation are presented for discussion and a vote at the next Parish Council meeting.
- To lead on the continuing research into the processes needed to make the road through Aller village a 20 MPH Zone e.g. to undertake Parish surveys and fundraising as required.

- To lead on making a further case to Somerset Council and Highways and Byways to undertake an assessment of what other traffic calming measures might be appropriate in light of this report.
- Related to the above to make further enquiries with the appropriate bodies as to traffic calming measures they would recommend e.g. the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents or other expert advice.

Conclusion

Aller Parish Council is determined to attend to the issues and concerns as outlined above and will be pursuing solutions over the next 12 months. It is important to note again that the Parish Council is dependent on other authorities and organisations to achieve solutions that are decided upon. As well as putting forward recommendations for action as appropriate, the purpose of this report is to gather the support of others, including the official road authorities, through presenting as much information and context to the issue.

See images of a research map created with precise measurements of some sections of the A372 running through Aller (hard copy available) + photos below for illustration purposes more can be supplied upon request:













TRUCK SIZES

Length: normal 16.5 metres
Length: longest 18.75 metres
Width: up to 2.8 metres NOT including wing mirrors
Windsor Tractor unit and trailer: 7.5 metres long 5 metres high
Other types: such as carriers can be higher

Considerations and suggestions

- A road, not wide enough for 2-way traffic to safely pass, especially trucks
- Pedestrians in danger from traffic mounting the footpath, and wing mirrors which extend past the kerb
- accidents regularly damage houses and walls
- possible 20mph zone
- slow traffic down, from the north, with graded speed limits: 40mph, 30mph, 20mph
- traffic lights
- use 'intelligent traffic lights' which sense large oncoming vehicles and can temporarily hold up the traffic coming the other direction
- chicanes

Old School House

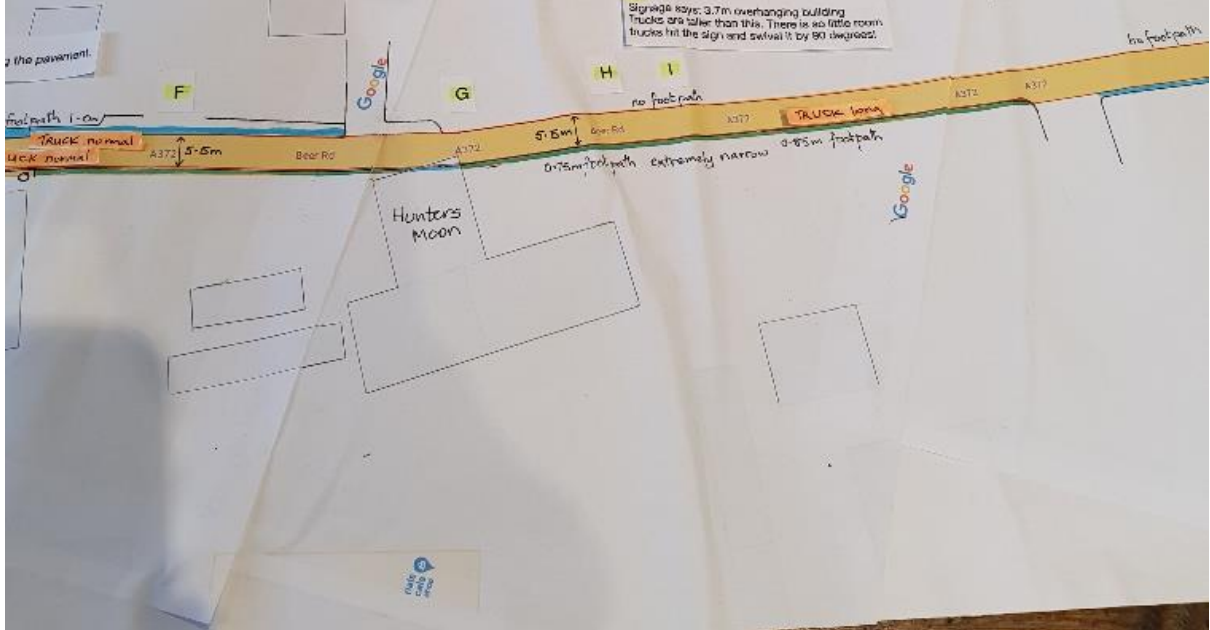
F
Trucks cannot pass without using the pavement
wing mirror catches regularly
Footpath breaking up

G
Hunters Moon:
Footpath extremely narrow 0.85 m
Road narrow 5.5m
Road carver caused trucks to lean towards house if they mount the kerb they damage the roof and gutting: More than 5 times in recent years

I
Extremely narrow footpath, none on other side of road
not wide enough for a wheelchair or to safely use a pushchair or pram
danger of being hit by car or truck wing mirrors
cannot walk two abreast
not accessible for disabled people
trucks cannot pass easily
Local number: Cars and vans travel too fast up the hill, cannot see if a truck is approaching

H
Signage says: 3.7m overhanging building
Trucks are taller than this. There is so little room trucks hit the sign and swivel it by 90 degrees!

J
Road too narrow
Cars and vans
to pedestrians



Considerations and suggestions

- A-road, not wide enough for 2-way traffic to safely pass, especially trucks
- Pedestrians in danger from traffic mounting the footpath, and wing mirrors which extend past the kerb
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- traffic lights
- use 'intelligent traffic lights' which sense large oncoming vehicles and can temporarily hold up the traffic coming the other direction
- canes

Extremely narrow footpath, none on other side of road
- not wide enough for a wheelchair or to safely use a pushchair or pram
- danger of being hit by car or truck wing mirrors
- cannot walk two abreast
- area not accessible for disabled people
- trucks cannot pass easily
- road summit: Cars and vans travel too fast and cannot see if a truck is approaching

3.7m overhanging building
- more than this. There is so little room
- to turn and swivel it by 90 degrees

Victoria Cottage

J
Road too narrow for Trucks to pass
Cars and vans too fast and too close to pedestrians

Manor Cottage

