

Fornham All Saints traffic sign survey September 2018

Introductory comments

I carried out an on-foot survey of all traffic signage on the main roads within the village boundaries.

The purpose was two-fold: to comment on the state of the signage, and to comment on signs which, in the view of the Parish Council, could safely be removed. The former was in connection with the proposed village clean-up, for which there have been a number of volunteers. The latter is the Parish Council's recognition that there are too many signs in our small and pretty village.

Before I began this task, I read some (but not all) of The Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2016 (TSR).

The TSR 2016 seeks to set out guidance on how local authorities can (and should) reduce sign clutter.

It is a generally accepted position that traffic sign overload (especially speed messages), will lead to road user-disregard.

We have sign clutter (to quote the terminology from the TSR), which could be leading to disregard of the overall message behind the signs. This could be dangerous, especially in the case of motorists who use the road all the time, and are thus familiar with the signs.

Pretending we have speed cameras when we don't for example, leads to contempt for the underlying message which is 'reduce your speed'. Saying beware 'oncoming vehicles in the middle of the road' when they are not, can lead to contempt towards all signs.

Below are a few extracts from the TSR which I believe are relevant for FAS.

"...Reducing sign clutter

2.9 Overuse of traffic signs blights our landscape, wastes taxpayers' money and dilutes important road safety messages. Research carried out by the Department to inform the Traffic Signs Policy Review showed that the number of traffic signs has doubled in the last 20 years. This is unsustainable, and bears out the need to reduce signing whenever possible. A culture change is needed in the way signing is used. 9 2.10 In June 2015 the Secretary of State asked Sir Alan Duncan MP to lead a task force looking into all the issues surrounding sign clutter and to make recommendations as to how this can be reduced further, building on the work TSRGD has already done...

2.11 Reducing sign clutter was a key aim of the revision of the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions. TSRGD 2016 contains a number of changes which will cut costs, complexity and sign clutter. It provides a modern framework that will mean far fewer signs need to be placed, and gives local authorities the right to remove many of their existing signs.

2.12 The Department sets the legislation governing what traffic signs look like and mean, but decisions about which traffic signs to place and where to place them is a matter for local authorities. TSRGD 2016 gives authorities more tools than ever before to tackle the scourge of too many signs.

2.13 The Department expects authorities to be proactive in making use of these tools to get rid of unwanted and unnecessary signs, and design signing schemes to minimise visual clutter from the outset...

13.3 ...the requirement to place at least one repeater sign along a speed limit has been removed. The onus is on the traffic authority to determine the appropriate provision of speed limit repeaters having regard to existing guidance. In deciding this, it is strongly recommended that consideration is given to the potential for challenge to the enforcement of the speed limit..."

I also came across a 2016 scheme to remove center white lines which was piloted in London. This was lauded by Roadpeace, the national charity for road crash victims. It seems to have caused controversy, but there is mention that it has reduced speed by more than 14% in the areas it was piloted in (London and Sandringham included).

I believe that when the Parish Council has a conversation with Highways, the issue of removing, as white lines in the village should be on the agenda.

I am not qualified to go through the TSR 2016 and apply its recommendations to each and every one of our plethora of traffic signs, and say with authority 'this one can be culled as it's unnecessary'. However, in the comments which follow, I have made what I believe are common-sense observations.

1. I do not believe we should have traffic camera signs in the village. It adds to sign clutter; it is like the boy who cried wolf, and will lead to disregard for the true messages we need to give road users. It also conflicts with our own speed recorder. If there's really a camera, there'd be no ad hoc speed recorder.

Sat nav/Google maps on smartphones tell motorists where speed cameras are. The fake camera signs were fine in the days before this technology.

2. I do not believe we should have signs saying 'oncoming vehicles in the middle of the road', as this is also inaccurate. A lorry and a car can easily pass at any of the allegedly narrowed parts of the road in the village.
3. I do not believe we should have multiple signs giving speed messages/warnings in addition to markings on the road itself giving yet more messages (SLOW in huge white letters for example). For drivers going through the village for the first time, it is information overload. For regular drivers, it is just cause to disregard the lot with a wave of the hand saying 'yeah right'.
4. I think we should defer any work on Tut Hill signage/furniture until we know its fate. This is by far the worst stretch of road in the village both for traffic, and numbers of signs. I have put some comments on the Tut Hill colour sheets which follow for completeness. I think spending time and effort planning what should happen with signage there, should await the consultation next year.
5. If the village gets a pedestrian crossing of any description, there will have to be signage announcing it. There will also be new road markings to factor in. This survey does not take either of those issues into account. Making overall recommendations about changes to signage in the lower end of the village needs to take these potential changes into account.

6. It is my view that if the road-side black and white marker posts/reflective posts marker posts are replaced, they will be broken again in due course. Due to budget constraints, it will be unlikely we'll keep getting another bite of the budget cherry to replace them. This means the village will be blighted by snapped, drooping black posts indefinitely.

I think we need to look at what (if anything) replaces them in terms of the longevity they will give us. Do we feel they add anything? If not, should we not adopt a more practical approach and stick with road furniture which can't be destroyed so readily?

7. If there is funding, removal of the faded 'slow' white markings on the road should also be considered in my view for all the reasons I have already touched upon.

There are not that many signs which need cleaning. The main issues are the black and white posts around the narrowed areas of road both on Tut Hill and in the center of the village. I suspect even a vigorous scrub with detergent will not do much to restore them however. On Tut Hill, it would be positively dangerous to work on the black and white posts which are not broken.

Some signs are faded – that's a Highways issue, not a cleaning one.

More relevant is the encroachment of hedges/trees which bury signs or make them impossible to read. I have included some photos of some of them in the pages which follow. Some will be the responsibility of landowners; some will need to be dealt with by householders. I think over the winter months volunteers could take a section of the village each, note down each obscured sign, and log it with the PC. We can then send the appropriate letter/emails to the properties which need to take action. I have also highlighted to Howard some issues on Tut Hill involving overhead cables in a tree which looks worrisome.

I have not found any signs which I believe are structurally unsound, eg about to fall over, or hazardous. The black and white boundary markers on Tut Hill, and those around the traffic calmed areas in the lower end of the village are self-evident as to which are broken. None are an immediate hazard. There are some remnants which could be picked up and disposed of, from the more historically smashed up posts. On Tut Hill the verge is liberally peppered with their remains.

It is hard to make hard and fast recommendations, because the status of the roads in the village are in a state of flux. There are possible pedestrian crossings to factor in; new crops of pop-up signs from Marham Park and local businesses; the possible closure of Tut Hill; traffic challenges the Stennets and Rackham developments will bring over time; the inevitable challenges from the WSOH; and of course the huge increase of cars from Marham Park and the associated Vision 2031 developments.

The important thing in my view is to have an overall plan, and to start from scratch with that plan. If we add to what is there already, or remove the odd sign or post here and there, we may end up with another hotchpotch that will look even worse, and not do the job we want it to do either.

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