

Gate on Manor Road (Gravesend Town Centre)

A report by the Head of Transport and Development to the Highways Advisory Board on 8 May 2008

Introduction

1. Gravesham Borough Council seek to introduce a gate on the highway at the entrance to Manor Road.
2. Manor Road is on the periphery of the pedestrian zone in Gravesend town centre. The plan in Appendix 1 shows this road in relation to the town centre.
3. The Joint Transportation Board resolved at its meeting on 26 March that 'the County Highways Board be requested to consider the installation of an unmanned gate at the entrance to Manor Road in order to ensure highway safety'.

Discussion

4. A major extension of the town centre pedestrian zone was introduced in 1990, the restrictions in the town centre (including Manor Road) included restrictions on the times of day when vehicles can enter roads and the class of vehicle permitted to enter the roads, and permission to enter for access or loading/unloading purposes.
5. The conditions have remained unchanged during this period with the exception of a small variation in the time during which access is permitted.
6. The restrictions in Manor Road are however complex. All vehicles are prohibited between 10.30 am and 4.30 pm except for access to small private off-street car parks and access for loading by goods vehicles. These exceptions were necessary to ensure the viability of small businesses in this road.
7. The complex nature of the restrictions has resulted in the restrictions being ignored by some drivers as Manor Road offers an opportunity to travel from west to east across the town centre without using the one-way system. This is however useful to a limited amount of traffic visiting the town centre as there are west to east routes just outside the immediate town centre area.
8. Surveys of traffic activity were undertaken when Gravesham Borough Council promoted the introduction of the gate, these are included in full in appendix 2.
9. In summary, the survey revealed 834 vehicles using the route between 7 am and 7 pm of which 98 appeared to be legitimate. During the busiest hour (17.30 to 18.30) 196 vehicles used the route.
10. In addition the crash data was reviewed as Gravesham Borough Council had also cited road safety as a reason to provide a gate. The 10 year crash record for Manor Road shows 3 crashes recorded.
11. The three crashes occurred overnight between 11 pm and 1 am, one of which involved a driver who tested positive for alcohol. They occurred in 1998, 2001 and 2006.

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Police Concerns

12. Consultation with Kent Police indicates that whilst they acknowledge there is a degree of abuse of the current restrictions, this has been ongoing for many years and enforcement is unlikely to create a significant long term reduction in use.
13. The Police also acknowledge the sign is complex and therefore difficult for drivers to understand, but it must reflect the conditions that apply. If the sign is to be simplified the restrictions (in the Traffic Regulation Order) must be revised. As has already been indicated, the restrictions reflect the needs of the town centre businesses.
14. The Police do not support the provision of an unmanned gate as suggested by Gravesham Borough Council. Their concern is that the gate will not be properly managed and that it could be open when it is meant to be closed and vice versa. Pedestrians could therefore be more vulnerable thinking traffic is not allowed to enter, but in fact have access because the gate has not been closed.

Highway Concerns

15. The provision of a gate across a highway is not generally allowed. Any form of 'obstruction' be it a gate or rising bollards has to be risk assessed to ensure it will operate correctly and does not introduce danger to road users or liability to the Highway Authority.
16. The proposal by Gravesham Borough Council i.e. an unmanned gate which might be closed by legitimate users or parking attendants or town wardens is not a robust or safe system. It exposes the Highway Authority to unnecessary risk of claims.

Summary

17. The unauthorised use of this road (and any road) is a matter for Police enforcement – as with speeding or ignoring no entry signs or prohibited turns. In all these cases there are drivers willing to break the law. Sometimes it is possible to introduce physical measures to aid enforcement, sometimes enforcement is the only option. The proposed introduction of an unmanned gate in Manor Road is not acceptable to the Police or Kent Highway Services as it introduces unacceptable risks of liability to Kent Highway Services.
18. The 10 year crash record does not provide evidence to support the Borough Council's contention that the road is not safe.

Conclusion

19. Although drivers do ignore the restrictions, there are no overriding safety reasons for a gate to be introduced for safety reasons.