

Lyndhurst and Minstead Traffic Management Working Party

Mill Lane Traffic Problems – Update no.1

01/12/16

This is an update on the current state of our efforts to evaluate the problem of traffic congestion in Mill Lane, and come up with feasible options to improve the situation.

Who are we?

The Lyndhurst and Minstead Traffic Management Working Party (LMTMWP) was formed in June of this year as a joint venture between Lyndhurst Parish Council and Minstead Parish Council. Our brief is to look at traffic problems which affect both parishes. Number one on our list is the Mill Lane rat run, and this is where all our efforts are currently aimed.

What are our Parishioners Views?

Our first action was to try and find out how Lyndhurst and Minstead residents viewed the problem. We have talked to as many as possible, and several have written to express their concerns. This has been very valuable and we welcome any further contributions.

The most significant views that have emerged from this are:-

- sat navs and smart phones have made the problem significantly worse over the last couple of years.
- drivers unfamiliar with the single track and passing places section often fail to understand how to drive it properly, and that this is not surprising given how badly it is explained and signposted.
- the worst incidents tend to involve inappropriate vehicles trying to use the single lane section. Most frequently caravans that have been directed that way with no warning of the type of road involved.
- the speed of traffic on the two lane section closest to the A337 can be an issue.
- many and various solutions have been suggested!

Other Evidence

By pure coincidence Radio Solent did a breakfast drive time piece on the problem. Their reporter visited Mill Lane with parish councillors from Lyndhurst and Minstead on August 23rd. On this day Mill Lane was gridlocked, partly due to problems on other roads in the area, and interviews with those stuck showed that many had been directed that way by their sat navs and smart phones.

What can we do in the Short Term?

Our first possible action was to try and arrange a meeting between LMTMWP, Hampshire County Council Highways, The Verderers, and the Police to define what actions we could take in the short term, and what actions were not possible. The Verderers and Police are happy to do this but unfortunately Hampshire County Council Traffic Management were not able to agree to this meeting as their new policy only allows them to use their limited resources in areas where death or serious injury are involved (the new policy can be found on the hants.gov.uk website if you search for 'future traffic management' – it is not easy to find). Mill Lane does not come into this category. Whatever we think about this we cannot change it, however we will continue to engage with Hampshire County Council Highways to try and find areas where we can improve matters. We believe there may be some improvements to signage which could show the route is inappropriate for larger vehicles.

We believe the problem is heavily seasonal, and largely caused by the increase in visitors to the area who are unfamiliar with Mill Lane. We will write to appropriate accommodation providers (caravan parks, campsites, hotels, etc.) before the start of next season to ask them to explain to their customers that the Mill Lane route is not appropriate for larger vehicles, and may increase their journey time.

We can try to use speedwatch on the two lane section closest to the A337.

What can we do in the Longer Term?

Our own tests have shown that most sat navs and route planners send traffic that is trying to get from the A337 to the A35 (or vice versa) along Mill Lane to avoid Lyndhurst. This is at the route planning stage and systems with real time traffic updates must make the situation worse when there are problems on other roads in the area such as the A31. We will try to find if anything can be done about this. However it is likely that this will not be easy given that Mill Lane is a public highway open to most traffic (it does have weight and width restrictions). There is already a national debate about trying to improve the road specific information on commercial vehicle sat nav systems, and ensuring that these are used by the appropriate vehicles. Systems aimed at private users tend to use very general levels of information based on road type.

What is not Possible

Our efforts to date have shown very clearly that funding for traffic management measures is very limited. Mill Lane does not meet the death or serious injury criteria that Hampshire County Council work to, and Lyndhurst and Minstead Parish Councils do not have the resources to fund any major schemes. Thus there will not be any one way systems or traffic lights appearing.

The Verderers are very clear that they will oppose any attempt to return the single lane section to two way due to the loss of grazing involved. It is highly likely that Natural England would also oppose this due to the SSSI status of the verges. LMTMWP agree with this – the single lane section may be very frustrating but it does slow traffic down, it does make many local drivers avoid the road, and there have not been any serious accidents on this section. We understand how frustrating this is to residents who cannot avoid the problem and we are trying to find feasible actions that will improve the situation.

Given the severe financial limitations outlined above we have decided that the issue of a possible Lyndhurst Bypass should not form part of our remit.

The 'Lyndhurst and Minstead Traffic Management Working Party' consists of

Cllr Helen Bennett – Minstead PC – (helen.bennett160@yahoo.com)

Cllr George Bisson – Lyndhurst PC – (georgebisson@tiscali.co.uk)

Cllr Richard Taylor – Minstead PC – (taylorr01@aol.com)

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Communications can be addressed to all or any of the above. We hope to provide further updates as and when appropriate. If you know of parishioners who would like to receive these please ask them to get in touch with us by email.