

SALTASH, CORNWALL

Notes and observations from town visit July 27th, 2016

Introduction

The following notes follow on from a brief visit and analysis of Saltash in Cornwall, following a request from the Saltash Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group. The aim was to provide some very preliminary observations and advice concerning the relationship of traffic to the public realm in the town, and to provide some initial suggestions and recommendations.

The visit concluded with an early evening discussion with members of the Steering Group and Town Council in The Guildhall, following on from an illustrated presentation by Ben Hamilton-Baillie on a number of core principles applied successfully in a number of other towns and villages across the UK.



Saltash



The historically vital ferry terminal for the crossing of the Tamar still serves as an important focal point for Saltash. The street layout and steeply sloping topography leads down towards the riverside, where former marine and industrial uses are gradually being supplemented or replaced by leisure activity. The waterfront provides an attractive draw for residents and visitors, and the pubs, café and stunning views continue to be one of the town's principal assets. The long, straight Fore Street, the principal shopping and business street of the town, leads down towards the river at the eastern end, terminating in a very steep gradient down the banks of the Tamar. The railway station, close to Isambard Kingdom Brunel's magnificent Royal Albert Bridge, is also close to the river. The waterfront and station remain somewhat isolated from the town centre, with relatively poor and under-celebrated pedestrian links up the steep hillside.

Saltash has a population of around 16-17,000, and is likely to see significant housing growth to the north and west of its current urban boundaries. It is the largest town in East Cornwall, and one of the largest in the County. Much of the employment

(around 80%) is based in Plymouth, and the Tamar Bridge is recording around a 2% annual increase in motor traffic. The expansion of businesses such as Ginsters in Callington provides an additional source of employment to the north. The Town also provides a significant number of businesses in car dealerships and the related automotive industry. Fore Street provides the frontage for around 92 businesses, of which around 60 are retail units and shop fronts.



Renewal and transformation on the Saltash waterfront



The delights of a riverside location...



Steep drop to river at the end of Fore St.

Saltash includes five primary schools, one secondary school (Saltash.net Community School) and Saltash College, a branch of Cornwall College. 20 mph zones have been established around most of the schools. The proportion of pupils travelling to school on foot or by bike remains low.

Neighbourhood Plan issues and concerns

The impact of traffic, especially in relation to volume and speeds, and the consequential effects on the comfort, confidence and safety of pedestrians and cyclists has been highlighted as concerns in the public assessments carried out for the Neighbourhood Plan. Congestion, particularly relating to the Burraton Cross junction at the intersection of Callington Road with New Road (B3271) is also perceived as a problem. The vitality of the town centre and especially Fore Street is a high priority for the Town Council and Chamber of Commerce. Proposed future housing expansion to the west and north-west of the town (Broadmoor Wood and Latchbrook) present specific challenges for retaining the town's coherence and connectivity, especially where divided by the A38 trunk road. To the north, the hamlet of Carkeel is particularly isolated from the town centre by the speed and volume of traffic on the Callington Road, and by the barrier of the major roundabout at Callington Road, due to be further enlarged.

The connections between the town centre and the Town Quay are perceived as a long-standing concern, particularly as the regeneration of the waterfront increasingly attracts businesses and activity to Saltash. The existing links of Lower Fore Street and Albert Road are not especially attractive for pedestrians (their gradients make them a serious challenge to cyclists!).

The town is reasonably well-served with off-street car parks, with four managed by Cornwall CC., each with around 100 spaces. The first hour is free, taking pressure off the need for short-term on-street parking in the relatively narrow central streets.

Cornwall County Council see a modal shift away from car dependency towards more walking, cycling and public transport as a high priority. Around £1 m. is currently allocated for 2017-18 for cycling provision.



Steep gradients between town and river



Burraton Cross – congestion and barriers

Initial observations

Market towns, in common with all retail centres, are under severe pressure, in part from out-of-town outlets and superstores, but more significantly as the internet brings fundamental changes to shopping patterns and communication. High streets are no longer merely places for the functional distribution of goods and services. To survive, they have to adapt to places that attract people for social exchange and interaction, as well as to be able to offer services that cannot be provided on-line. This change in the purpose of town centres brings very significant implications for the importance of quality and distinctiveness in the public realm. The relationship between traffic movement is critical to such quality.

Fore Street in Saltash has fared better than many similar high streets in the UK. It still presents a lively and attractive array of shops and businesses, with a number of new cafés and businesses reflecting the shift towards social activity. Inevitably there are some signs of decline and decay, but there are relatively few unoccupied shops.



Fore Street – an attractive town centre undergoing change and renewal

Fore Street suffers from poor connectivity and lack of suitable landmark places at either end. At the top of the hill to the west, the potentially attractive small park, Victoria Gardens, is isolated from Fore Street by highway measures. This potentially important space is dominated by an oversized mini-roundabout, with pedestrian connections left to narrow sidelines. Likewise the foot of Fore Street, to the east, the junction with North Road, "Simon's Corner", presents a large, sweeping car-dominated space which interrupts the continuity with Lower Fore Street. The loss of a suitable landmark space to terminate Fore Street is a legacy of the widening of the street in the 1970's.

Top of Fore Street



Victoria Gardens – a fine pocket park cut off from the top end of Fore Street



The head of Fore Street dominated by road markings, pushing pedestrians to the sides

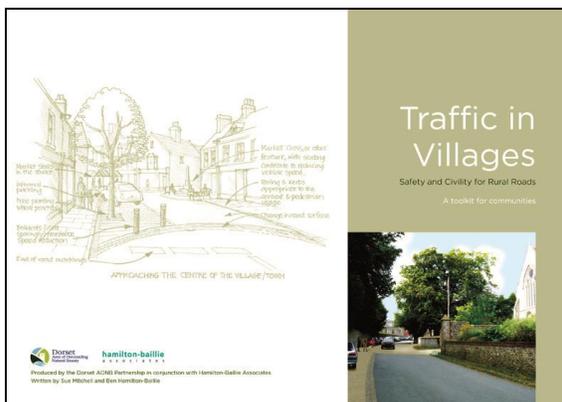
Simon's Corner



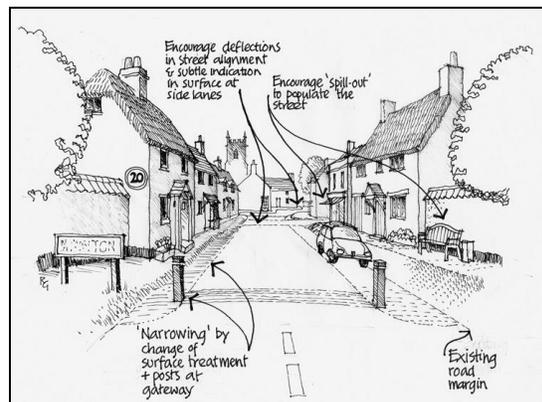
The foot of Fore Street – a large area dominated by the sweeping curve to North Road

Transitions

Experience with other towns and villages elsewhere in the UK and in mainland Europe has highlighted the importance of clear and distinctive transition points to provide drivers with an evident gateway from the higher speed context of the highway to the lower-speed, more complex environment of the town. The Dorset AONB's guide 'Traffic in Villages' stresses the importance of consistency of highway treatment with the morphology, landscape and built form of a town or village, to ensure an appropriate change of scale and speed context.



Traffic in Villages: A toolkit. Dorset AONB



Defining the village entry point

The proximity of the boundaries of Saltash to the A38, and the gradual expansion to the north and west, present particular problems for establishing an appropriate low-speed civic environment in the town centre streets. Traffic entering from the east, coming off the Tamar Bridge, approaches a T-junction with North Street, close to the foot of Fore Street. Despite laudable efforts by local people to present an attractive floral welcome to the town, the entrance is dominated by severe highways clutter. Pedestrians are penned behind guardrails, and the elements associated with high-speed highways are allowed to leach into the town centre. The result is higher speeds and more dominant traffic than is helpful for a convivial high street.



The eastern entrance is overwhelmed by highways clutter and signage

The A38 serves as the town boundary along most of the northern edge of Saltash, generating particular problems for links to Carkeel. To the south the Latchbrook Leat provides a natural boundary at Burraton Coombe and Forder. From the west, the approach along Liskeard Road presents an unclear transition between the A38 and

the town centre. A fast, straight road, with an inadequate bicycle lane, does little to define where Saltash begins, and where the scale and speed environment should change.



A wide, fast approach on Liskeard Road. The Ploughman Inn could serve as an entrance.

Burriton Cross

The cross-roads of Callington Road with Liskeard Road / New Road is an important intersection for the street network in Saltash. It is the focus for significant congestion during peak hours, when the traffic signals generate long delays for inbound and outbound traffic. Unlike most cross-roads, it does not generate much economic activity, apart from a somewhat isolated convenience store. Old photographs illustrate a once more intimate and active space. Today the very wide dimensions sterilise the space, and make crossing both Callington Road and New Road uncomfortable and unattractive.

It would certainly be possible to reconfigure this junction such that the signals could be removed, and a low-speed, free-flowing movement pattern be re-established. The volumes of traffic, even at peak hours, could be accommodated by the use of informal roundabouts or "roundels". The reduction in interruptions in traffic flows and the lack of long "inter-green" periods would reduce delays and congestion. Lane numbers and space to stack traffic held at the lights could be better used to widen footways and/or create on-street parking or space for street trees. Reduced lane widths would make crossings shorter and safer, with less interference from pedestrian crossing in the traffic flows. Poynton in Cheshire provides one precedent.



Burraton Cross consists of a very large area of asphalt, creating a poor arrangement for traffic flows, and a weak trading environment. In former times it served a more civic role

However, the reconfiguration of this junction may not be justified as a priority for Saltash, given its distance from the town centre. A remodelling of a junction of this size would require significant spending and considerable disruption. Unless a large scale regeneration of this area of town is proposed (perhaps as a consequence of expansion northwards and westward), it may be more appropriate to focus on more immediate changes required in the town centre.

Carkeel

The small hamlet of Carkeel, to the north of Saltash, consists of a number of houses spread out along the Callington Road and a minor lane to the north. The speed and volume of traffic, combined with the absence of a coherent footway, discourages walking or cycling (despite the close proximity to Saltash). Here again, the settlement lacks any clear point of transition from the faster highway into the village. The width of carriageways and dominance of road markings and centre lines both contribute to uncomfortably high speeds, and are unnecessary for a village environment such as

Carkeel's. Proposed changes in the street network resulting from the development of Broadmoor may allow for a new link from the A38 to the north of Carkeel, permitting a reconfiguration of the Callington Road through the hamlet as a quiet, pedestrian-friendly, low-speed village street.



Carkeel suffers from excessive speeds and traffic dominance, exacerbated by the wide carriageways, dominant road markings, and lack of a clear transition at the village entry. Future developments at Broadmoor may offer opportunities to remodel.

Speeds in Saltash generally

Despite the introduction of 20 mph speed limits around school entrances, there continues to be a concern about speed in Saltash and its impact on safety, economic vitality and civic quality. In many places, the continued use of centre-line road markings combined with wide carriageways, undifferentiated on-street parking spaces, linear yellow line parking restrictions and lack of identifiable places create a speed environment incompatible with pedestrian and bicycle safety and comfort. The

gradual removal of road markings, combined with simple place-making and visual narrowing, could be carried out on a gradual phased basis using low-cost applied surfaces and minor kerb realignments. Such changes in the visual cues presented to drivers by the street layout will be significantly more effective than any continued reliance on speed humps, signs, speed limits, cameras and similar expensive interventions. A “design speed” of between 15 and 22 mph would be appropriate for a town such as Saltash, which could be achieved with relatively minor modifications and simplifications carried out on a consistent basis over time.



Top: St Stephen’s Road leading down to the College – white lines, wide carriageways and narrow pavements combine to foster higher speeds. Humps and signage merely add to the highway clutter. Such street forms generate high speeds outside schools

Conclusions

Saltash is one of many towns seeking to improve its quality and contribution to the local economy by generating a clear consensus around a long-term neighbourhood plan. And as with so many towns, the impact of growing traffic and speeds is rightly

perceived as one of the most critical challenges for the community and its local authorities. These notes summarise some initial observations and recommendations for ways in which small changes in the design, management and maintenance of streets and intersections could begin to address such issues over both the medium and long term. The approaches outlined are likely to be especially important given the proposed expansion of the town to the north and west, and the need to enhance the physical and perceived connections between the Town Centre and the Tamar waterfront.

Saltash clearly benefits from a dedicated and committed Neighbourhood Planning Team, backed by the Town Council, Chamber of Commerce, the District and County Councils and other interest groups. If the observations and initial recommendations outlined above are broadly supported, it may be beneficial to take the proposals forward to a more detailed stage, and to commission an outline report and feasibility study. It may be appropriate to commission this in partnership with one or more of the proposed developers, and the report could provide a model pilot scheme for other towns and villages in Cornwall.



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