

Reconnecting Froxfield

Resolving problems of a village divided by a road



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1. Froxfield present

Straddling the A4 road, Froxfield is a village which at the last census (2011) had a population of 382. This included 153 men and 229 women and covered 168 households. (i)

The highest population enjoyed by Froxfield was 625 in 1841; the lowest 266 in 1971. (ii)

The village extends along the very wide A4 – with narrow (often single-track) side roads leading off it towards Little Bedwyn, Great Bedwyn, Chilton Foliat and Ramsbury. There are also three smaller residential ‘no-thru’ roads.

There is a thriving private nursery school (Stepping Stones) within the village boundary at the hamlet of Oakhill. There are several substantial businesses based in Froxfield – furniture retailer OKA has its major south west showroom on the A4, at the western end of the village; along Littlecote Road, we find BK Grain Handling Engineers, operating in Froxfield since 1981; Brendoncare offers nursing care for 44 residents and The Blanchard Collective has a 6000sq ft warehouse for 18 antique dealers.

2. Froxfield past

The earliest written record of anything on the site of the parish of Froxfield was found in the year 778, where a parcel of land in the general area was called Frosca burna – or 'frog's bourn' — but this does not necessarily mean that there was a settlement there. It was first called Froxfield 22 years later, in 800, when it was an estate owned by the Bishop of Winchester. (iii)

The most striking feature of Froxfield are the Almshouses, opened in the late 1600s and endowed under the will of The Duchess of Somerset. The Kennet & Avon canal which opened in 1799 runs through the southeastern corner of the parish. The small Church in the west of the village dates to the 12th Century. The river Dun also runs through the village (often called Froxfield stream).



3. The history of Froxfield's Roads

The A4 road through Froxfield village has always been the historic 'Great West Road', linking London with Bath and Bristol and the route is little changed since as early as 1675. However, there was an earlier road that followed the valley created by the Froxfield stream, and crossed the parish in the 13th century. The road was 'turnpiked' (created as a toll road) in the early 18th century, but these were removed in the late 19th century. The road to the west originally did a 'dog leg' around the village green and interestingly, what is currently a bridleway between Ramsbury and Rudge was, in the late 18th century, a road that ran between Ramsbury and Great Bedwyn. At the point where the Froxfield stream and the Ramsbury road crossed had been called 'Crossford' in the late 19th century. (iv)

4. Froxfield within a Conservation Area



Froxfield was first designated a Conservation Area in 1993 in recognition of its architectural and historic character. The village lies within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, however its position astride the arterial London to Bath road has brought both 'benefits and problems'... Froxfield is modest in scale but has a high proportion of historic buildings which mainly consist of thatched cottages or terraced houses. Froxfield is in a reasonable state of equilibrium where the long-established rural character survives and significant change in the future is not anticipated. Where in-filling or replacement of existing properties takes place in the future it will be important to ensure that special regard is given to the historic and physical contexts in which the new development will fit. (v)

The Conservation Area statement for the village went on to say the A4 route through Froxfield had no longer any strategic status.

5. The A4 and its relationship to Froxfield's identity and community

Although the village has been dissected by the A4 for hundreds of years, only in the 20th Century, has the road come to have an overpowering effect on the village's identity. Despite the creation of the M4, cars and lorries continue to use the A4 as a high-speed route between Hungerford and Marlborough. Today, Froxfield has been basically reduced to a chicane during the otherwise unimpeded journey between the two towns and its historic context goes unnoticed. This is particularly obvious in the summer months when the road is popular with tourists and groups of recreational motorcyclists, keen to enjoy the long uninterrupted stretches of the A4 en route to Marlborough.

The road was progressively widened with homes and businesses demolished to accommodate the increasing use of the car during the mid-twentieth century – development which accelerated the loss of a village character and amenities.

Now the A4 is no longer a trunk road, although it continues to be an important connection between Berkshire and Wiltshire.

The official speed limit was reduced to 40mph through the village in 2003 (vi). However, the reality is that most of the traffic actually travels far faster than this as demonstrated by a Metrocount readings taken in 2014 (vii).



Froxfield – once shared space.

6. Parish Council analyses issues

The Froxfield Parish Council has for some time been aware that the A4 and the speed at which traffic passes through Froxfield is by far the biggest concern of villagers and the road has come to dominate the very identity of Froxfield.

Traffic on the A4, as it is managed currently, presents a risk to pedestrians and discourages the use of alternative forms of transport such as cycling.

Although discussions have been on-going for some time with the Community Area Transport Group (CATG) the Parish Council recently decided to seek the help of road design specialists Hamilton-Baillie Associates, who have an internationally-recognised reputation for working with communities seeking to address traffic issues.

7. Assessment by Hamilton-Baillie Associates

The Parish Council was pleased to welcome Ben Hamilton-Baillie to assess and make recommendations on how we might approach traffic calming of the A4.

Hamilton-Baillie Associates are specialists in providing innovative solutions for reconciling traffic movement with quality public spaces in cities, towns and villages. They have vast expertise in the development of shared space principles for street design to improve safety, congestion and access. They have particular experience in high street design principles, and of working with rural communities to address traffic issues in smaller towns and villages.

Clients include highway authorities, government agencies, developers, community groups and design teams in architecture, urban and landscape design, planning, regeneration, transport and traffic engineering.

Ben Hamilton-Baillie visited Froxfield in December 2015 and presented his assessment and ideas on managing the A4's impact on the village to the Parish Council members. He pointed out that the Government's "**Manual for Streets**" report of 2011 overturned decades of accepted wisdom in town planning and accepted that streets should be returned to a state of "**shared use**" as far as possible.

His findings:

- Excessive speeds are almost encouraged by the absence of 'a sense of risk'. In order to change attitudes of drivers passing through Froxfield the A4 needs to be re-designed to encourage better behaviour. The white road markings and 'aggressive' hashing serve to encourage speed – as does the width of the road which provides the driver a sense of safety, regardless of the speed limit. The A4 has long since ceased to 'respond to the village' and the concept of being a shared space. It is solely the domain of traffic passing through.
- There is virtually no visual difference between the fast highway either side of the village and the road as it passes through Froxfield. Therefore, while the road through Froxfield continues to appear to be a continuation of the highway, drivers will simply adopt a speed dictated by the road layout and their subconscious perception of their safety – again, regardless of speed limit.
- Village road signs are confusing, often poorly positioned, out of date or irrelevant and have therefore become meaningless to residents and drivers alike. For instance, the 'Welcome to Froxfield' signs are too far away from the village edge to have any impact on people's perception of approaching a built-up area where they need to slow down.
- The road detracts from the village's historic beauty and context. Froxfield is currently an anonymous place to pass through as quickly as possible rather than a historic and beautiful village. In the 20th century, the village's character was overwhelmed by the A4 – there are now huge areas of tarmac – the A4 has 'leaked out' into surrounding roads on either side.



Key points from report by Hamilton-Baillie Associates

- The A4 is too wide at Froxfield, which encourages speed.
- The “Welcome to Froxfield” signage is too far out from the settlement and has no impact.
- The white lines push the traffic towards pedestrians, make speeding feel safer and should be re-moved in favour of softer markings
- The road no longer "responds to the village" as a residential area and ignores its historic context.
- Traffic volumes as measured by the Metrocount could function perfectly well on an A4 at half its current width.
- Confusing signs are generally ignored and clutter a beautiful environment.
- The A4 has "leaked out" into the surrounding smaller roads with wide areas of tarmac which encourages speeding.

8. Wiltshire Council strategic commitments to improving road design

Wiltshire Council laid out goals with the aim of better safety, security and health of the county as part of its strategic transport objectives in *Road Traffic Strategy 2011 - 2026* – which are particularly pertinent to Froxfield’s situation:

SO8 To improve safety for all road users and to reduce the number of casualties on Wiltshire’s roads.

SO9 To reduce the impact of traffic speeds in towns and villages.

SO14 To promote travel modes that are beneficial to health.

A key factor in achieving these objectives was to provide: “Improved road safety through a combination of education, enforcement and engineering measures” and “encouraging people to walk and cycle more as part of their daily lives.” (viii)

Issues Matrix

Issue	Current position	Aspirations/ Objectives	Actions / Recommendation
Speeding vehicles causing danger to pedestrians and other motorists	Local monitoring reports speeding in rural areas and outskirts of town	Optimise road safety throughout the MCA	Investigate the implementation of specific traffic calming schemes

Marlborough Area Plan

In addition to this, the **Marlborough Area Plan (2012 - 2017)** also targets reducing speed as a key ambition. (ix)

Issue	Current position	Aspirations/ Objectives	Actions / Recommendation
Speeding contd.			Reduction of speed limits in rural areas Improving speed limit signage Increasing the number and frequency of speed camera patrols

Marlborough Area Plan

Issue	Current position	Aspirations/ Objectives	Actions / Recommendation
High cost of parking discouraging shoppers, tourists and workers	MCA residents avoiding the town for shopping and business	Cost effective options for shoppers, tourists and workers	Identify new parking areas and options Cost effective parking schemes
Dangerous routes and speeding motorists in rural, High Street and urban areas	High incidence of speeding in built-up areas Road design and maintenance not conducive to safe driving	Overall reduction in speeding incidents and traffic conflict	Move and/or reduce boundary speed limits Enable 'speedwatch' schemes Design a Management Plan for Marlborough High Street

Later, the same report identifies speeding motorists causing a danger to pedestrians as a key issue across the Wiltshire area. (x)

Moving Forward – Proposals

Froxfield Parish Council feels the current A4 road design and markings primarily work to reduce the risk of road accidents, but work against the interests of the villagers – discouraging walking and cycling and cleaving the village in two.

This safer road encourages speeding. The passage through Froxfield feels safe and fast for drivers who barely notice that they are in a village environment.

The A4 at Froxfield would be a prime candidate for redesign adopting the ‘shared space’ philosophy espoused by Hamilton-Baillie Associates.

Following the visit by Ben Hamilton-Baillie, the Parish Council has drawn up a priorities list of action which it would like to take forward to Wiltshire Council.

Action 1

Re-siting the entrance signs to Froxfield.

- To bring the 'official' entrance to Froxfield nearer to the village – particularly on the western approaches.
- We propose using white gates (or similar visual alert) and to bring the "Welcome to Froxfield" signage to just before the entrance to OKA on the western approach and just before the Pelican pub on the eastern approach.
- We would also like smaller white gates on the side approaches to the village – Brewhouse Hill, Littlecote Road and Church Road.



The current approach to Froxfield is too far removed from the village edge



An example of a village approach at Rogate, Hampshire

The approach shown on the left was given to us by Ben Hamilton-Baillie as an example where a village has adopted new thinking on its road layout. Rather than the former remote village sign, placed next to speed limit signs, his new concept has been to create a 'sense of arrival'... there is an immediate connection to the built-up area of the village, strips of coloured tarmac, of different road surface serve to make the road seem narrower and slower.

An 'roundabout' effect also helps to encourage drivers to proceed with more caution.

The example below is a reimagining of Froxfield's eastern approach where, through the removal of the white road markings and the siting of The Pelican's sign across the road, the effect is to discourage speeding, without even the need for speed limit signage... but simply by creating an sense of 'arrival' which would be hard for motorists to ignore.

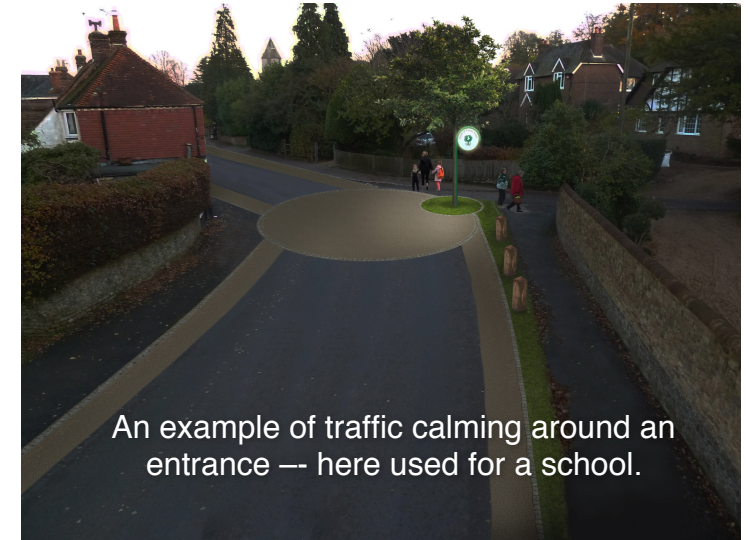


**ONE POSSIBLE TREATMENT OF FROXFIELD
EASTERN APPROACH – DESIGN CONCEPT BY
BEN HAMILTON-BAILLIE**



The current east approach to Froxfield

The current area around the OKA entrance would be a more appropriate situation for the Froxfield welcome signs and gates. We would propose engaging with both OKA and The Pelican in the design process and possibly funding of these changes.



An example of traffic calming around an entrance — here used for a school.

Above is an example of the type of road markings highlighting an entrance which could be used to highlight the turning to OKA (current situation below).



The difference a change of road markings might make on [a different part of] the A4 in Wilshire.



Action 2

Encourage traffic to slow down – ideally to 30mph on the A4 and 20 mph [or slower] on the side roads.

- Use road markings to push traffic away from the vulnerable pedestrians and to allow safe space for cyclists. Widen existing footpaths and pavements through the village along the A4.
- Road markings should achieve a visual narrowing of the road: therefore, remove the centre white hashing and replaced with side 'panels' of a different colour [such as red].
- On side roads **Brewhouse Hill, Littlecote and Church Road the speed limits should be reduced to 20mph. This is the maximum safe speed in our assessment.**



Narrow footpaths... which then disappear completely



Heavy traffic is pushed out towards the paths.



Brewhouse Hill (above) narrows and here a safe speed would be no more than 20mph.

Action 3

Redesign junction at the bottom of Brewhouse Hill



DIRECTION OF ONCOMING TRAFFIC CAUSING PROBLEMS



PREFERRED APPROACH TO BREWHOUSE HILL

- Stop traffic turning into the western entry by extending and redesigning the current island (marked in yellow) – either to close entirely or allow only exiting traffic. All traffic wishing to turn up Brewhouse Hill would do so at the junction. There might be scope to increase parking behind the island and to have this landscaped with trees or planters.



Traffic can turn from the A4 (red arrow) across the front of the old Cross Keys (private house) and risk head-on collision with the traffic turning from Brewhouse Hill towards Marlborough.



Bold white arrows mis-direct traffic

Action 4

Create more obvious pedestrian crossing points

- Change road markings and add pinch points to both narrow the A4 and indicate the crossing to motorists at the bottom of Brewhouse Hill [crossing to the Village Hall], the current crossing at the bus stops in the centre of the village and the historic steps down to the road in front of The College.



In his report to the Froxfield Parish Council, Ben Hamilton-Baillie identified key points of interest in the village. We have marked the proposed new 'village entrances' as 1 and 2. Three key crossing points along the road marked by green circles. These would be the major focal points for re-defining the village centre to drivers.



Example of type of road colouring which indicates likely crossing point.

Only the bus stop crossing at the end of the green has any current pedestrian safety precautions – bollards and a central crossing reservation. We would propose that all these crossings be highlighted by changing the colour of the road and by suitable landscaping or by changing the profile of the road. This would make traffic aware of the crossing points and improve the perception of risk to drivers.

At the entrance to The College, for example, historic alighting steps are still in use by the residents as a point to cross the road and to disembark from buses. However the road markings here are more concerned with dividing speeding traffic.



THE HISTORIC STEPS ARE STILL IN USE AND LOCAL BUSES FREQUENTLY STOP HERE TO ALLOW THE RESIDENTS TO ALIGHT.

Action 5

Redesign the area around the bus stops

- Possible option: Block off this access from west-bound traffic and amalgamate the two bus stops into one around the shelter – or even to re-position the shelter completely. Seek road engineering advice on a solution.

The area around the entrance to Church Road encourages cars to cut across the A4 at speed, across the oncoming traffic (green arrow) or to accelerate out of the road to 'get in ahead' of a stream of traffic. Thus cars are often seen still travelling at 40 to 50mph past the houses – between two bus stops (on different sides of the road) whose main users are either school children or older residents. The road then connects with the T junction for traffic travelling to and from Marlborough/Great Bedwyn. On both approaches there are often 'near misses' and traffic travels too fast and the road narrows suddenly besides the green.



Accelerating cars are a major hazard.



The view in the 1920s



The view today



The wide tarmac encourages speeding

Action 6

Reduce the visual clutter of signage in the Village centre

- Removing as much of unnecessary signage as possible.



There has been a gradual build-up of signage across Froxfield; we feel much is of little practical use or has become dilapidated and, therefore an eye-sore in an AONB; the messages are often self-evident and probably therefore ignored by motorists. The speed restriction signs changes too quickly across a short distance, which is confusing.



Summary

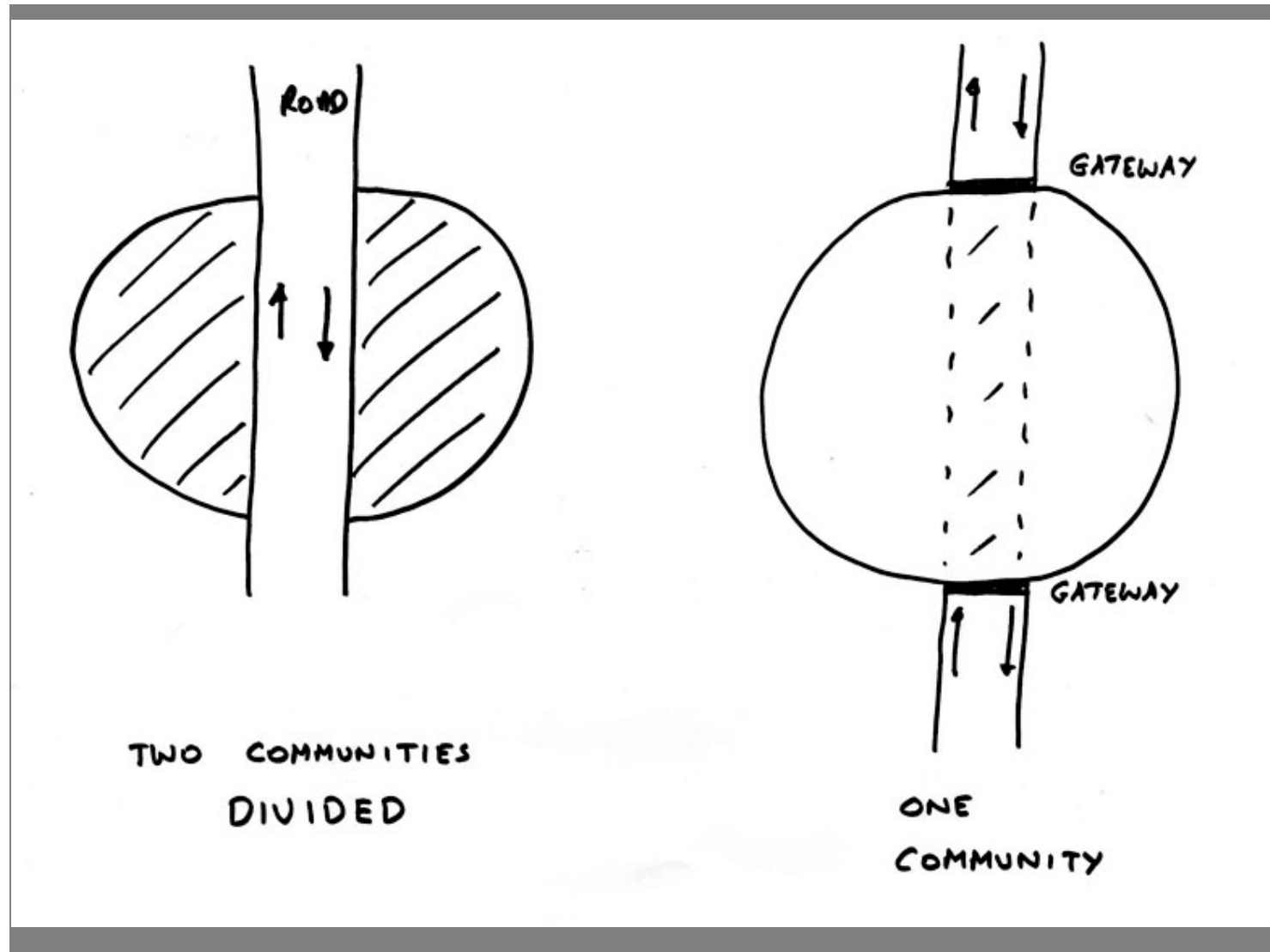
Issues

The speed of traffic through Froxfield has a huge impact on the village of almost 400 people. The A4 effectively divides the village in half and has destroyed any sense of 'shared space' and community. The positioning of the 'Welcome to Froxfield' signage is too remote from the village to have a real impact on drivers' expectation of entering a settlement. Despite traffic calming measures and a reduction in the speed limit to 40mph, cars and lorries still thunder through the village [as measured by a recent Metrocount survey]. The road markings have been designed to make the passage of traffic safer at the current speeds, but at the expense of villagers as pedestrians and other road-users i.e cyclists. The current crossing points do not reflect where villagers actually cross. Narrow side roads meet the A4 at two dangerous junctions and the current 30mph speed limit is much too high.

Proposals

1. Reposition the "Welcome to Froxfield" signs closer to the village and make more of a feature of these with white gates (or similar) and larger signs. Engage with both OKA and The Pelican in the design process.
2. Redesign the road markings to recreate an identity for Froxfield village centre. Make the road appear more narrow which would encourage drivers to voluntarily reduce their speed as has been shown to be the case elsewhere in the country.
3. Redesign the bottom of Brewhouse Hill where it connects with the A4 to stop traffic cutting across the A4 in a dangerous way.
4. Use road colouring to create an identity for the village's crossing points – the bottom of Brewhouse Hill, the bus and the College crossings. Reconnect the two halves of the village, currently divided, by recreating a sense of the road through Froxfield as 'shared space'.
5. Redesign the area around the bus stops to stop the cars travelling between Hungerford and Ramsbury cutting across at speed.

6. Remove visual clutter of signage in the village.



Sketch: Ben Hamilton-Baillie
December 2015

Froxfield – a Village Divided.

Notes & Acknowledgements

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- (i) <https://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadKeyFigures.do?a=7&b=11123631&c=Froxfield&d=16&e=62&g=6475577&i=1001x1003x1032x1004&m=0&r=1&s=1456476562932&enc=1&nsjs=true&nsck=false&nssvg=false&nswid=1549>
- (ii) <http://history.wiltshire.gov.uk/community/getcensus.php?id=115>
- (iii) <http://history.wiltshire.gov.uk/community/getcom.php?id=102>
- (iv) <http://history.wiltshire.gov.uk/community/getcom.php?id=102> and The Great Bath Road 1700 - 1830 by Barbara Buchanan published by Bath Spa University [<https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/Media/CHC%20Images/Vol%2004%20-%2004.%20Buchanan%20-%20The%20Great%20Bath%20Road,%201700-1830.pdf>]
- (v) Conservation area: http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/froxfield_appraisal_and_man_plan_-_approved_document-2.pdf
- (vi) Decision on reducing speed limit: [https://cms.wiltshire.gov.uk/Data/Regulatory%20Committee%20\(WCC\)/20030205/Agenda/\\$Item%20No.%2011%20-%20Froxfield%20-%20Objections%20to%20Speed%20Limit%20-%20.doc.pdf](https://cms.wiltshire.gov.uk/Data/Regulatory%20Committee%20(WCC)/20030205/Agenda/$Item%20No.%2011%20-%20Froxfield%20-%20Objections%20to%20Speed%20Limit%20-%20.doc.pdf)
- (vii) Metro count: Area CATG report: "Metrocount carried out in the village from 9-16 September with an 85th %ile of 49.4mph. http://services.wiltshire.gov.uk/Areaboard/get_areaboard_issue.php?id=3366
- (viii) Wiltshire Road Traffic Strategy 2011 - 2026: <http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/transportpoliciesandstrategies/localtransportplan3.htm>
- (ix) Marlborough Area Plan (2012 - 2107) page 15 <http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/marlborough-area-plan.pdf>
- (x) Ibid page 24/25

This report was compiled by members of the Froxfield Parish Council Roads & Traffic Committee – Tertius Hough, Claire Costello and Vanya Body. March 2016