



# DORSET AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

## Traffic and Rural Settlements

Pilot Studies:

Maiden Newton & South Perrott



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**Dorset**  
AREA OF OUTSTANDING  
NATURAL BEAUTY  
PARTNERSHIP

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#### INTRODUCTION

These notes build on a series of events organized and commissioned by the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in early 2009. These aimed to explore the potential for addressing the quality of the built and natural environment in rural areas in the context of Dorset's Rural Roads Protocol. The Dorset AONB has played a key role in helping develop the Protocol alongside Dorset County Council and its other partners. The pilot studies for two villages in the west of the County add to existing studies in the Piddle Valley, and are intended to help explore and develop a range of ideas for communities located on busier A and B roads.

Both communities involved in the pilot studies have carried out surveys through their Parish Councils to gather views and opinions about their respective communities. The great majority of concerns centre around traffic, and the detrimental effects associated with vehicles. Typically these include concerns about speed, safety, and the comfort of pedestrians. There are also concerns about the barriers caused by busy roads, the difficulties for cyclists, and actual or potential damage to buildings and structures. Noise and vibrations are also a problem, as well as the deterioration in the coherence, character and quality of the rural built environment.

Such issues are not unique to Dorset. Almost every settlement in the country situated on busy roads suffers similar problems. The balance between the need for free-flowing movement of traffic and the quality of the built and natural environment is a universal concern. The special qualities of West Dorset merely bring such issues into sharper focus. These pilot studies therefore aim to consider the particular circumstances of just two villages, and to draw both specific and general ideas and principles which could be applied universally.

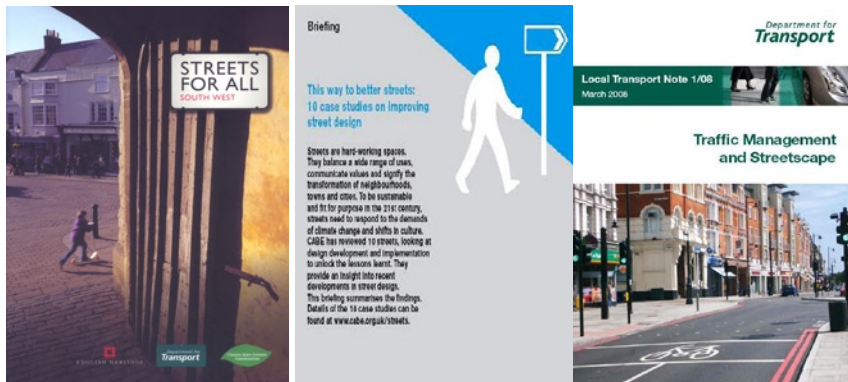




## THE CONTEXT

The pilot studies are well timed. The publication of *The Manual for Streets* in March 2007 by the Department for Transport (DfT) and others highlights a broader change in policy and practice for traffic management, movement and place-making. *Manual for Streets* addresses the design and management of residential streets, although its underlying principles are equally applicable to rural roads and busier streets. Emerging ideas such as “Shared Space” have begun to inspire new ideas for a different relationship between traffic and communities, and between the professional principles that underpin highway and street design in built-up areas. The publication of *Local Advice Note 01/08, Traffic Management and Streetscape*, by the DfT underpins a more comprehensive approach to urban design and traffic engineering. Organisations such as the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and English Heritage are putting significant resources into research and development of good practice for urban streetscapes. Despite excellent work by bodies such as the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) to raise awareness of the tension between road transport and the countryside, the issue of traffic in rural areas has generally received less attention than urban streetscapes. However, Dorset has played a leading role in reviewing policy and practice for smaller villages and country highways. The publication of the *Dorset Rural Roads Protocol* outlines important changes in the approach to rural roads, lanes and the streetscapes of smaller communities. Nationally, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB’s) and National Parks have been at the forefront of these changes. Similar initiatives to Dorset’s Protocol can be seen in development in Cumbria, Devon, Hampshire, Gloucestershire, Kent, Suffolk, Wiltshire and many other counties.

Attempts to seek an improved balance between traffic movement and rural communities reflect broader challenges. These include the needs for rural regeneration, demographic changes and housing policies, economic development and retention of local facilities, broader transport objectives such as the need to promote walking and cycling, as well as overriding issues of sustainability and environmental protection. Whilst changes in the design and maintenance of rural roads cannot address these issues on their own, the proposals form one component in a move to protect and enhance rural communities in Dorset.



## EVENTS

The pilot studies were launched by an initial introductory event held in Charlton Down on February 11th 2009. Senior officers from Dorset County Council and the Dorset AONB outlined the background to the development of the Rural Roads Protocol. Representatives from the two pilot villages, Maiden Newton and South Perrott, introduced the context and key concerns of residents in both settlements. Ben Hamilton-Baillie illustrated and explained the broader context of the pilot studies and the changes taking place, regionally, nationally and internationally, in policy and practice for addressing the relationship between traffic and places. Issues covered included:

- The shift away from a policy of traffic segregation towards integration
- Government policy development such as Manual for Streets, and best practice advice from CABI, English Heritage, the County Surveyors' Society (CSS) and other advisory bodies
- Developments in understanding driver psychology, particularly in relation to traffic speeds and safety, and driver perceptions of time
- Practical examples and case studies from mainland Europe and the UK
- Implications for highway authority organization and practice and the potential role of local communities in the management and adaptation of streets, spaces and rural roads.

Site study tours and walkabouts for the two pilot villages took place on March 5th 2009. Despite adverse weather conditions, both events were well attended by local residents and members of the respective parish councils, alongside representatives from parishes elsewhere in the County, together with staff from the AONB and their consultant. The visits prompted extensive discussion and exploration of the context and specific circumstances of each village, drawing on detailed local knowledge and experience. The walkabouts focused attention on a number of key locations and issues along the main traffic routes in addition to other relevant sites and landmarks relevant to the villages.

This phase of the programme concluded with an second public event in Charlton Down on March 25th. In addition to further updates on the Rural Roads Protocol,



*The Walkabouts - a slushy March morning*



the meeting allowed representatives from both the pilot studies and a significant number of other rural communities to review the underpinning principles for a new approach to rural street design. Examples of community actions to influence traffic speeds were explored, such as Lockeridge in Wiltshire and Beechcroft Avenue in North Oxford. A summary of the observations from the walkabouts were illustrated, together with initial sketch ideas intended to inform village plans and the influence future interventions at key points within the highway context of each village. A brief summary of the key points follows.

## MAIDEN NEWTON

### Form and Context

The larger village of Maiden Newton lies along the A356 Crewkerne – Dorchester road. Key influences on the form and development of the village include:

- The intersection of the route over Bedminster Down (Norden Lane) with the valley route of the A356.
- The location of mills and other water-based industries at the confluence of two streams in the valley.
- The arrival of the railway in the 1840's and the continuing use of the station as a significant transport link between Dorchester, Salisbury and beyond.

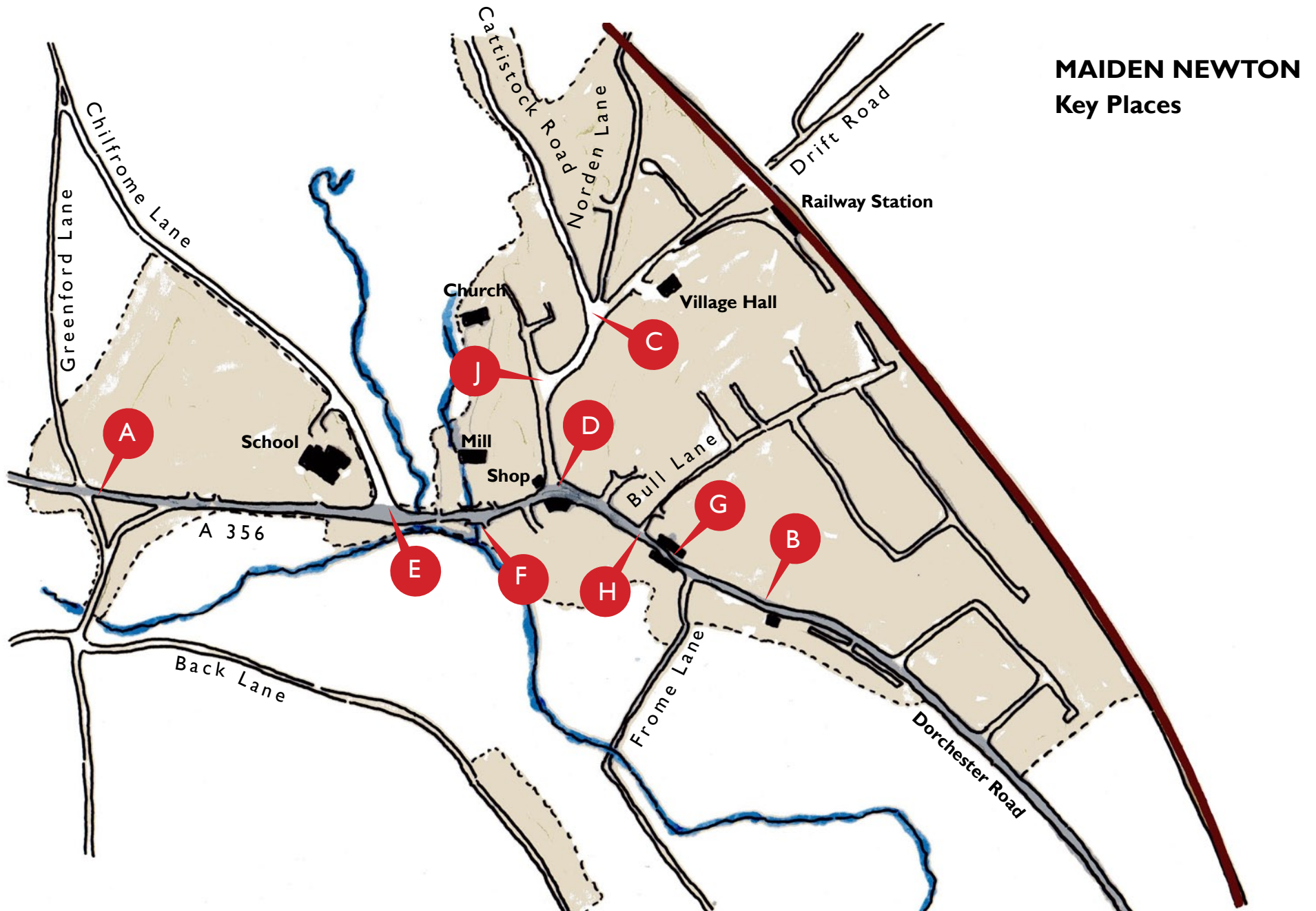
The centre of the village, at a bend in the Dorchester Road at the intersection with Church Road, includes three small shops and other businesses. To the north-west of the river bridge, the primary school provides the main focal point, set back from, and above, the main A356. To the south-east of the centre, 20th century development extends along the wider main road beyond the narrower scale of the historic village, a scale accentuated by a pinch point just west of Frome Lane, where the building line narrows the road to a single carriageway for 20 metres.

### Entry Points

Modern developments and highway engineering have eroded the legibility of the key entry points to the village. From the north-west, the Greenford Lane Triangle



Maiden Newton - Looking west towards the centre of the village





provides a natural transition point (A). From the south-east, the gateway into the village is less clear. The location of a petrol station and car showroom creates an uncomfortably wide and unenclosed space at the transition to the older part of the village (B). From the north-east, the intersection of Norden Lane with both Cattistock Road and Drift Road (the route of the Wessex Ridgeway and route to the station), presents a potential “entry lobby” to the village, but one that has been eroded by highway markings and wide sweeping kerbs (C).

### The Centre

All participants in the walkabout agreed that the centre of the village, at the junction with Church Road, required stronger definition (D). The bend in the road, the position of parked cars, and the activity associated with the shops contribute to lower speeds at this point, but there is little relationship between the highway and the distinctive surrounding buildings. The relocation of the village cross to the north of the space has resulted in the loss of a focal point, and the damaged paving presents a poor impression of the village.

### Other Key Spaces

#### The School

The school represents an important part of village life in Maiden Newton. However the entry leads off an unnecessarily wide road, Chilfrone Lane and an oversized bellmouth junction with the A356 (E). Despite the potential of its location close to the river, the school entrance does not provide an attractive gathering point, nor contribute to a slower-speed environment on the main road. Significant amount of land remains unused as a result of the highway geometry of the junction, space that could otherwise form an important component in the public space of the village, space that could accommodate a village bus stop, bench, noticeboard etc..

#### The River and Mill

The confluence of the River Frome and a smaller stream, together with the road bridge offers an important potential landmark for Maiden Newton (F). The eccentric fantasy castle, awaiting restoration, on the embankment of the bridge, combines with the splendid mill to create an intriguing and enchanting place. However, the



The uncomfortably open entry from the south-east (B)



The Norden Lane entry point (C). A potential entry space



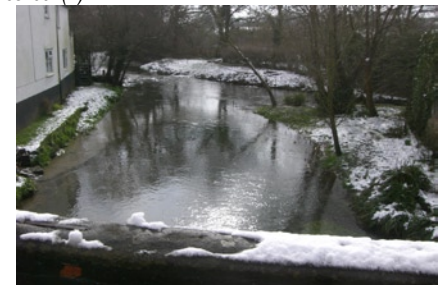
The shop and former cross at the centre of the village (D)



The wide bellmouth junction to Chilfrone Lane by the school (E)



The bridge and fantasy castle at the River Frome (F)







Heavy vehicles negotiate the bend at the centre (D)



The pinchpoint (G)



Junction with Bull Lane (H)



The war memorial on Church Road, (J) marginalised by road markings

current form and configuration of the road pays scant notice to the bridge, and it is unlikely that many drivers are aware of the river or to the special qualities of the surroundings.

### The Pinch Point

The narrow point in the Dorchester Road to the west of the village presents another opportunity to reinforce a slow-speed traffic context for the village (G). The existing arrangements, with standard priority signing and stop lines emphasize the highway context of this location. The urban elements detract from the historic qualities of the buildings that the narrowing is intended to protect. There is scope for integrating the design of the street with the framing buildings in more creative ways to strengthen the qualities of this point as a place in its own right, and to improve the comfort of pedestrians and cyclists through creating a very low-speed passage between the enclosing houses.

### Bull Lane Junction

The intersection of Bull Lane with the main Dorchester Road is one of a number of important junctions that could provide a sequence of “punctuation marks” along the length of the village (H). The Bull Lane turning is reported to be particularly problematic, with drivers finding it difficult to exit onto the main road. A slower-speed environment for the centre of the village could be reinforced through a clearer emphasis on intersections such as Bull Lane. This could be achieved through the addition of some simple edge paving such as setts or cobbles, rather than through extensive road markings.

### The War Memorial

Amongst the many notable spaces within Maiden Newton, the square surrounding the war memorial on Church Road is one that could particularly benefit from simple “place-making” (J). At present the road marking gives prominence to the sweeping bend on the approach from Norden Lane, marginalizing the presence and detracting from the dignity of the war memorial and the approach to the church. Simply removing the road markings at this point would restore much of the qualities of this significant space, reduce the urbanising effect, and contribute to creating a slower speed environment for the village.

### Norden Lane Gateway

The space at the intersection of Norden Lane, Cattistock Road and Station Road is well defined by its surrounding buildings, and offers an opportunity for a clear entry lobby for Maiden Newton. At present the road markings and stop lines erode the spatial qualities of this arrival point, and emphasize the linear priorities along Norden Lane. Again, a simple language of materials, perhaps supplemented by planting and street furniture, could exploit the particular qualities of this space and contribute to creating a slower-speed environment. It could also provide a legible landmark on the route connecting the railway station with the village centre, and a landmark on the Wessex Ridgeway.

### Conclusions for Maiden Newton

Maiden Newton retains sufficient distinctive qualities that, given greater emphasis and sympathetic design treatment, could help create a low-speed environment throughout the centre of the village. A streetscape that naturally promotes lower speeds would help resolve many of the key concerns expressed by residents without significantly reducing the ability of the highway network to cope with the volume of traffic and size of vehicles.

The key recommendations for helping create a lower speed environment include small-scale measures to reflect the particular context and respond to the historic qualities of the village. Such interventions could focus on:

- Creating clearer entry and transition points at the key entrances to the village on the A354 and on the approach from Norden Lane.
- Creating a stronger sense of place at the centre of the village, exploiting the bend at the intersection of Church Road with the Dorchester Road.
- Exploiting the qualities of key spaces and landmarks within the village, such as the War Memorial, the pinchpoint, and the relationship of the main road with the river and bridge.
- Providing a sequence of spaces throughout the village, responding to activities and intersections such as the intersection with Bull Lane, which help reduce the linearity of the A356 through the village.
- Improving the approach to the school at the intersection with Chilfrome Lane, reducing the width of the existing bellmouth junction and making



Norden Lane Junction. Markings emphasize speed



Norden Lane - markings removed



Norden Lane - Place making by a central focal point



Norden Lane - Place making by framing the junction



*One of several traditional finger-posts in need of some care and attention*

better use of the existing public space. Temporary narrowing could be carried out immediately by strategically placing large planters and drawing a tighter kerb line on the existing asphalt to experiment with the effect of more appropriate alignments.

Maiden Newton benefits from an energetic and committed parish council, who are able to draw on the support of a wide range of local creativity and skills. The discussions and conclusions from the pilot studies are timely: the Parish is engaged in preparing their Parish Plan. The conclusions from these discussions could inform and guide the longer term development of the Parish Plan, and provide a basis for directing any highway or environmental measures that may be required.

In the shorter term, every opportunity should be taken encourage measures that enrich the quality of public space throughout the village, particularly those which communicate human presence and interest to drivers on the A356. The restoration and repainting of a finger-post, the encouragement of displays outside shops and establishments, and events that draw people back towards the main street and public spaces can all contribute to the reduction in the highway dominance that underpins these recommendations. Selecting, sourcing and funding new paving materials may take time and energy, and there may be opportunities where discrete additions using emulsion paint, or the imaginative use of Christmas lights or the positioning of temporary objects such as a Christmas tree can transform the relationship between traffic and the community through which it has to pass.

## SOUTH PERROTT

### Form and Context

The smaller settlement of South Perrott is also stretched out along the Crewkerne-Dorchester Road, at a point where the road dips to cross a small stream. Although there are houses and development on both sides of the A356 the older heart of the village, including the magnificent church, lies off to the south-west of the road, accessed by narrow lanes that bridge the stream. As a result the driver passing through South Perrott is less aware of the context of the village, and there is less of an obvious centre than in many settlements. The stream runs parallel to the road through much of the village, curling around the back of the Coach & Horses pub. The pub and its car park, combined with a small lay-by opposite, suggest a natural centre point for the main road through the village (A). To the south-east of the pub, vehicles have to negotiate a narrow pinch-point between a house and a tall estate wall that defines one edge of the road. See sketch plan overleaf.

### Entry points

The current entry points into South Perrott along the A356 lack definition. The location of the speed limit and village name signs are not particularly associated with buildings or landmarks, and the road lacks a clear point where the higher-speed changes scale and character as it enters the village. There are a variety of potential points where the village could be said to begin. The local group involved in the walkabout considered two locations where opportunities exist to highlight a change in the character and context from highway to village, although other opportunities undoubtedly exist.

From the north-west approach from Crewkerne, the junction of the Mosterton Road (Lecher Lane) with the A356 stands where the road makes a sharp bend and drops down into the village (B). At present the signage and road markings reinforce the highway characteristics at this point. Drivers are not made aware that they are entering a settlement, and there is no clear change in the scale or character of the road. Small scale interventions to the surfacing and surroundings of this junction could help provide a transition and help reduce the speed context. A clearer emphasis on place could also contribute to the safety of this sharp bend.



Approaching the centre from the west (A)



The church set back away from the road



From the west: widths and markings increase speeds



One of several side roads off the main A356



The Mosterton Road (Lecher Lane) junction at the bend forms a natural entry point from the west (B)



The finger-post marks the village entry.



The approach to South Perrott from the east (C)



Picket Lane Bridge (C) A glimpse of the stream



Picket Lane junction. A transition point in scale



The pub car park and forecourt, with the layby, forms a clear focal point at the centre of the village



The pinch point. The markings and speed limit sign are inappropriate for the very slow speeds necessary.



In place of the linear continuity provided by the white lines, contrasting paving could be used to emphasize the narrowness and care required



From the east, the A356 passes alongside a number of farms and houses before dropping down sharply to the junction with Picket Lane (C). Picket Lane serves as an important access to much of the village, and its intersection with the main road combines with a bridge over the stream and a row of picturesque kerb-fronted thatched cottages. It is a place which serves as an informal bus stop, and marks a clear transition in scale on the approach to the historic core of the village. Again, some minor changes to this gateway point could help highlight the finer grain of the built environment at this intersection, and there may be opportunities to make the stream more visible and more approachable.

### The Centre

South Perrott is now too small to support local shops and facilities, but the space framed by the Coach & Horses pub remains the natural centre of the village along the A356. The geometry of the car park and the lay-by cut into the bank on the north side of the road offers the opportunity to create a notional “square” or place, through which the road passes. With the pub management in transition, opportunities exist to consider enhancing the quality of the car park, perhaps exploiting the presence of the stream and more imaginative planting, to improve the relationship of the main road with the pub and its surroundings. Such measures could significantly increase the presence of the pub, and improve opportunities for passing trade.

### The Pinch Point

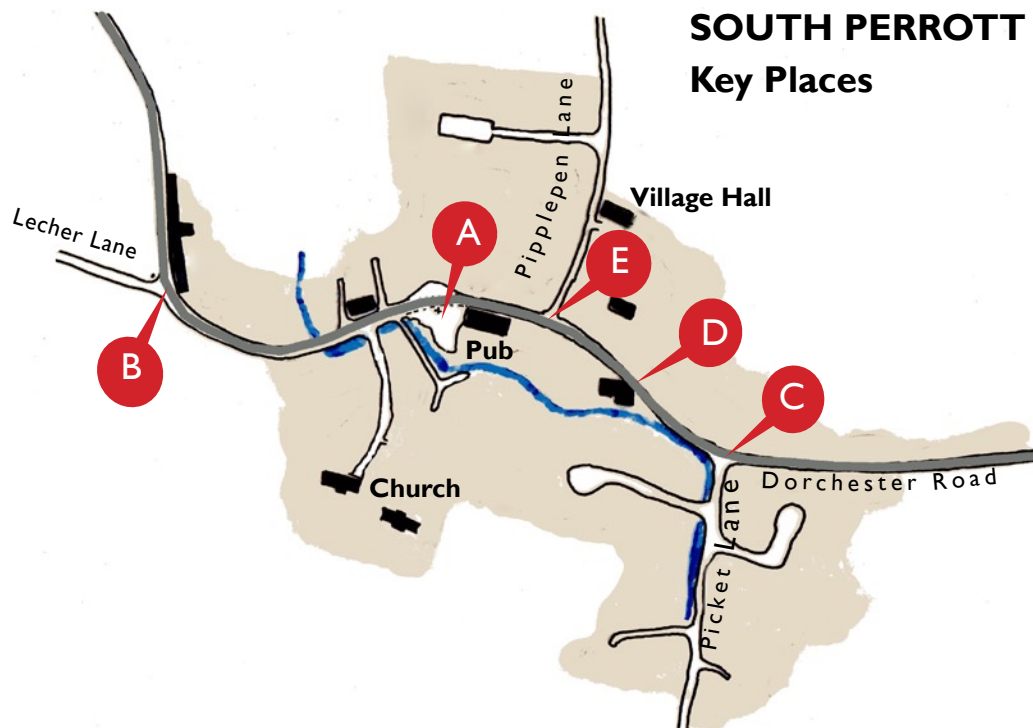
Just to the east of the pub, the A356 narrows to negotiate a limited gap between buildings and garden wall, reducing the highway width to around 5 metres (D). There are long-standing concerns about continuing damage to the built fabric from glancing vehicle impacts, and high visibility markings have been mounted on both sides. Speed limit roundels on the carriageway, warning signs and reflective marker posts have been installed, in vain, to try to mitigate the problem.

As in Maiden Newton, there are opportunities to exploit this pinch point to dramatically reduce the speed context of the village, and to reinforce the need for very careful driving and communication with other road users. We would recommend removing centre-line markings and introducing surface treatments that emphasize the narrowness of the gap. In place of highway sign and hazard markings, there may be

opportunities to improve driver awareness and care through introducing elements that intrigue or amuse. Trompe l'Oeil sculpture or paintings on the building, garden wall or riverside could introduce a creative, distinctive and memorable characteristics to the pinch-point, and achieve the effect of lower speeds through treating the site as a positive asset rather than as a problematic hazard.

### Other significant places

South Perrott is a village largely set back from the main road, accessed by attractive narrow lanes. As in Maiden Newton, the intersections of these lanes with the A356 could be highlighted (in addition to Picket Lane) to help reduce the speed context of the main road and to increase the legibility of the village. Pipplepen Lane (E) (the lane leading up to the village hall) and Church Lane are particular examples.



The narrow pinchpoint from the west. Removing the lines, and emphasizing the presence of the wall through trompe l'oeuil or sculpture?



Several narrow intersections, including Pipplepen Lane (E) and Church Lane, provide opportunities for creating a simple sequence of spaces.



Sweeping curve of the A356 through the centre and road markings increase the speed context and reduce awareness of place and context



Removing road markings, narrowing the apparent road widths, and creating a sequence of recognizable places could all help reduce speeds

## Conclusions for South Perrott

South Perrott lacks the scale and activity associated with larger villages and small towns. It is therefore important to exploit every opportunity to emphasize the presence and particular characteristics of the settlement along the A356. At present, vehicle speeds and a lack of engagement of drivers with their surroundings lies at the heart of the issues identified by local residents. Changing the natural speed context of South Perrott will require a series of changes to reinforce the contrast between the higher speed 'A' road and the sequence of places that constitute the village over the one kilometer length of the A356. Measures to achieve this contrast might include:

- Removing all centre line markings within the village, and reducing the apparent width of the road through the introduction of a contrasting edge treatment, such as a bound gravel finish, to the carriageway.
- Giving greater emphasis to the entry points at key junctions at either end of the village to help introduce a change in scale and speed.
- Creating a stronger centre to the village as part of a set of measures to improve the trading position of the public house, and to create a notional village square.
- Improving the relationship between the main road and the stream, perhaps through subtle emphasis on the bridges or careful treatment of the banks. Providing spaces to sit or play by the stream could help.
- Introducing a series of recognizable places along the length of the village, exploiting the intersections of the lanes that provide access to the village and the A356. Laying a few carefully selected setts could achieve this.
- Exploiting the specific characteristics of the pinch-point to create a distinctive and special place, prompting very low speeds and careful maneuvering by drivers requiring full engagement with their surroundings and with other road users.

Clear political will, supported by South Perrott's active parish community, offers the opportunity to accept and establish a clear expectation for much slower traffic speeds through the central part of the village, significantly enhancing safety.

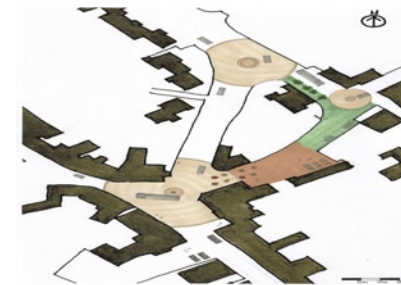
## CONCLUSIONS FROM THE PILOT STUDIES

Maiden Newton and South Perrott both exhibit characteristics and circumstances unique to their particular history and context. However a number of general themes emerge from the Dorset Rural Roads Protocol that could guide both the future management and maintenance of the main road, and suggest ways in which local residents could play a stronger role in improving the relationship between rural communities and their passing traffic. These themes could be extended and adapted for countless other towns and villages in Dorset, and elsewhere across the country.

Exploiting and enhancing a sense of place lies at the heart of our recommendations for the pilot studies. The principle of place-making is central to the Rural Roads Protocol. It draws on the findings from “shared space” projects throughout Europe. Playing down the linear characteristics of village highways, highlighting unique spatial qualities, reducing **apparent** widths of carriageways, and creating a series of distinct spaces and incidents are all common themes suggested by the pilot studies.

Creating clear entries and village centres forms an important theme of the pilot studies. The definition of such places is not fixed in stone, and can be supplemented and adjusted over time. Keeping the transition points as close to the village as possible, and exploiting the existing topography, landscape and built environment, are central to the underlying approach. A combination of paving, planting and simple place-making drawn from a clear understanding of context can inform an approach to highway design that stands in strong contrast to the traditional language of signs, chevrons and road markings.

Underpinning all aspects of the pilot studies is the issue of traffic speeds. The Rural Roads Protocol, and the pilot studies, introduce a new language to supplement or replace the conventional solutions to speed management of engineering, education and enforcement. Influencing the driver’s perception of time through increasing the contrast between “highway” and “place” suggests a fresh approach. David Engwicht (“Mental Speed Bumps – 2007”) demonstrates how speed of traffic is related to the degree of psychological retreat by people from the streetscape. Increasing the



*A simple approach to place-making through combining asphalt with carefully selected local materials.*



*Clearly identifying appropriate parking spaces through a simple change in paving materials.*



*Visual narrowing and careful realignment of kerbs to help reduce speeds and emphasize context.*



*Road marking and highway signs removed, and change in surfacing brings down speeds. Starston, Norfolk*





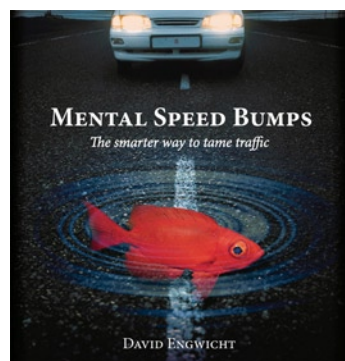
Creating a synthesis between rural road design and the village context. Visual narrowing, courtesy crossings and place-making. Makkinga, NL



Slower speeds created through contextual street design. Makkinga, The Netherlands



Village entry, changing the scale and speed context. Hampshire CC



perceptions of human presence in rural villages allows opportunity for a much greater involvement for local residents in creative and imaginative measures. The principles of shared space, combined with the pioneering approach of the Rural Roads Protocol, provide a new avenue for local energies and resources to be channeled into improving places, reducing pressure on hard-pressed highway authorities, and enhancing and protecting the unique qualities of each town and village whilst coping with the realities of traffic movement.

### Next Steps

The intention behind the pilot studies and the related work by Dorset AONB and Dorset County Council to address traffic in rural settlements is to increase the confidence and knowledge of local communities to develop new approaches to the issues of traffic. The ideas and outline proposals are intended to serve as a starting point, a first stage in building up a creative and practical set of measures and ideas to address a widespread and growing national issue. Although intended to be of particular interest and value to the communities of Maiden Newton and South Perrott, the pilot studies are also intended to serve a wider purpose in expanding the palette of measures and outlining an approach that points towards a new relationship between communities, AONB's, and their highway authority.

Some of the general themes and recommendations will be refined and developed into a growing "toolkit", managed and developed under the auspices of the Dorset AONB, which will serve to exploit and build on the underlying principles established through the pilot projects and to raise community awareness of the potential for the Rural Roads Protocol. Much further experimentation and design refinement will be necessary to fully address the issue of traffic in rural villages, and much education, and organisational development will be necessary in the coming years.

Dorset is committed to continuing to protecting and enhancing the quality of its towns and villages. The relationship with traffic is central to this objective. The realities of modern transport and freight distribution, and the historic form of rural settlements along busy roads, suggest that tensions between traffic and places will always exist. These studies are intended to help redefine this relationship, and expand the range of relatively low-cost, locally appropriate measures that might help.

Ben Hamilton-Baillie. June 2009