HAGLEY TRAFFIC OBSERVATION(A456) 2018/9, 2022 AND 2023

FINAL

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1. Background and Introduction

From the very beginning of work for the Hagley Neighbourhood Plan Group (HNPG) it was apparent to all concerned that traffic congestion on the A456 through Hagley was a major concern of residents and representatives alike. The issue was raised by Parish Councillors, District Councillors and the public; the strength of feeling about it was later confirmed by the results of the HNPG public consultations and the "Hagley Census".

It was clear that the issue was so important to Hagley residents that, contrary to usual practice, highways issues would have to form a major part of the eventual Neighbourhood Plan.

We were also made aware of the IDC report for WCC, dated 28/3/2018, on the junction of A456 with B4187/ Western Road/ Summervale Road, which showed that the maximum hourly junction-flow was:

- AM Peak (07.45 – 08.45) 2,491 vehicle movements
- PM Peak (17.15 – 18.15) 2,490 vehicle movements

WCC also stated in writing (pre-Pandemic) that, based on a broad assessment of available data, "the volume of traffic on this corridor appears to have stabilised at between 28,000 and 30,000 ADDT since 2011. This may suggest that the route is now at capacity."

The Movement group of the HNPG decided that we needed evidence of the problems that this created, both to develop the section of the Plan that would deal with traffic issues, and to form the basis of discussions with WCC to try to resolve the problems.

A Traffic Congestion Observation project was therefore undertaken. The original observations took place during December 2018 and January 2019; this was done on an informal basis by one person to establish the size of the problem. It was not undertaken with the rigour of the fixed methodology that was used in the 2022 and 2023 observations but was sufficient to suggest the extent of the problem. In this first observation, the time taken to drive along the A456 from the Webbs Garden Centre to the "Cala Roundabout" was recorded at various times in the morning peak, on several dates (not concurrent). There were frequent queues from the Garden Centre to the A456/450 junction and onto the A456/B4187 junction. After that, the traffic generally cleared up to the Traffic Lights at the "Cala Roundabout". The maximum time taken for this journey of approximately 1.6 miles, from Webbs to the "Cala Roundabout', was 28 minutes.

It was agreed that a follow-up, more controlled observation was required. However, the Pandemic intervened and further observations did not take place until September 2022 and, again, in September 2023; these were on a slightly different basis, as southbound congestion towards Kidderminster was also observed, and the

northern extent of the observation was extended to the "Cattle Market" junction of A456/A491. The results of these observations are discussed at length below.

It should be noted that after the 2018/9 observations, and before the 2022 observations, changes to the road layout of the A456 had been discussed, at HNPG's instigation, with WCC. This resulted in two changes:

- The left filter lane from the A456 onto the B4187 travelling northwards, was extended. This reverted the junction layout to a similar layout as it had been previously; and

- A left filter lane was signed at the "Cattle Market" junction of A456/A491, and traffic continuing on the A456 towards Birmingham was forced to take the outside lane

These are generally agreed to have been highly successful changes.

2. Methodology and Results

The Methodology used in 2022 and 2023 is shown in Attachment 1. A team of members of the HNPG undertook the observations during w/c 26/09/2022 and w/c 25/9/23. The results were then collated centrally; these collated results are shown in Attachment 2.

A sample of results taken in 2018/9 is also shown in Attachment 2. Note that these results are only for northbound journeys and only as far as the "Cala Roundabout", which is therefore a shorter distance than was used in the 2022 and 2023 observations. Although only a few results are shown, the time taken for the shorter, pre-Pandemic journey was normally longer than in 2022 or 2023.

3. Analysis

It became clear through observation during the survey that most of the traffic on the A456 through Hagley was through-traffic; however, there was also a notable amount of local traffic, often struggling to access the A456 from side roads. This causes further delays which have also been studied (see the Traffic Survey at A456/Newfield Road Report, dated 16/1/2024).

This is not surprising as the 2021 National Census showed that Hagley has considerably more car ownership than the National Average – 1.73 cars per household in Hagley, compared with 1.24 cars per household nationally.

As has already been noted, the delays observed in 2022 and 2023 were shorter than in 2018/9 and the traffic was generally moving more freely. We believe that this was due to three main reasons:

- Working from home. The “Hagley Census” in early 2020 (pre pandemic) indicated that only 78 out of 1,126 responses (6.3%) worked from home. In the 2021 national Census, some 18 months later, the figure was 44%. This dramatic increase can largely be explained by the Pandemic, and the employment profile of Hagley with 58% of the local population in categories L1 to L6. This suggests that, if this pattern of commuter traffic were reversed to pre-Pandemic levels, up to 1,400 workers could re-join the commuting group, although this degree of change is likely to be progressive. We have monitored closely both Press and scientific studies on this issue, and the trend back to working in the office on more days per week is already obvious.

- The improvements at the two junctions, as noted above in Section 1.

- The generally poorer economic situation.

However, traffic levels were still at a high level and four factors suggest that there may soon be a return to the even higher levels of congestion seen in 2018/9:

- The gradual weakening of the working from home effect, as indicated above. Recent press reports and scientific studies suggest that workers are being required to return to the office on more days of the week than in 2023; furthermore, the DOT’s latest national statistics show only a 5.5% reduction in traffic levels nationally.

- National traffic projections suggest a 20% increase in traffic density between 2025 and 2060.

- The general economic situation will improve at some point.

- There is little or no impact to date from the two very large Wyre Forest developments at Lea Castle (now called Park Gate) and Kidderminster East. However, houses are now being occupied in Lea Castle and the Kidderminster East development is just beginning. We believe that the latter site, in particular, will have a significant impact on traffic levels through Hagley and cause consequently more congestion.

Most serious of all of these factors for Hagley is, we believe, the development at Kidderminster East. We have therefore undertaken an analysis of the 2011 Census results (2021 Census results are not usable due to the impact of the Pandemic) for driving to work for the two nearest Kidderminster Districts (WF 003 and WF007). Whilst the Census results do not record the actual routes that drivers take, they do record their work destination, and it is relatively easy to make reasonable assumptions on the quickest and easiest routes that are available to them. This analysis, which is clearly not exact, shows that between 5% and 6% of these journeys

would be through Hagley. If we assume 1,400 houses on Kidderminster East (from the WF local Plan) and 1.23 cars per household (the national average, possibly a low estimate for Kidderminster) we can calculate an extra 1,722 cars on local routes. About 75% of these would be used to commute to work and if only 5% of them came through Hagley, this would mean that an additional 64 cars on the A456 at peak times. This may not sound a large increase, and it will come progressively over the next ten years, but when the A456 through Hagley is already at or near capacity, it will have a major impact. And we believe that this may be a substantial underestimate, as it is based on Kidderminster having sufficient employment opportunities for its growing population, and ignores the attraction of this new site to commuters to the Black Country and Birmingham, being only about four miles from Hagley with cheaper and available housing.

A further serious implication of these traffic congestion problems is a high level of pollution. NOx measurements at the Cross Keys junction of the A456 and 450 were already (in 2022) the highest in Bromsgrove District, although below the recommended maximum.

In addition, noise, although not measured on a formal basis, is a considerable concern for Hagley residents living along the A456. We have recommended that noise measurement should be undertaken.

4. <u>Conclusions</u>

The levels of congestion in 2018/9 were causing considerable issues for both Hagley residents and road users trying to drive through Hagley to get to their place of work. Both WCC reports and Hagley's own observations suggest that there is a major traffic-congestion problem in Hagley.

Whilst this lessened during the Pandemic and has not yet resumed its previous level, there is no reason to assume that it will not do so in the next few years. In addition, there are factors which suggest that, in the long term, it will grow beyond the levels seen in 2018/9.

We therefore believe that WCC and the Highways Agency must consider substantial change to the road network through Hagley.