

Cumberland 20mph Speed Limits & Zones Policy

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Contents

Document version control	2
Document change history	2
1. Introduction	4
2. Purpose	4
3. Principles of Policy	5
4. Assessment Criteria	6
5. References and Further Reading	6

1. Introduction

This policy outlines the assessment criteria that will be used when considering 20mph speed limits and zones in Cumberland.

Cumberland Council as the highway authority is responsible for determining and setting speed limits and zones across the road network in the region, with the exception of those roads managed by National Highway. The responsibility for enforcing these restrictions sits with Cumbria Police.

Cumbria Police will be a key statutory consultee when considering a 20mph speed limit or zone, to ensure unrealistic expectation is not placed on the police to provide enforcement beyond what can reasonably be expected.

20mph restrictions can be implemented in two forms, namely 20mph limits and 20mph zones. 20mph limits are indicated by terminal signs and repeater signs, and do not require traffic calming. On the other hand, 20mph zones require traffic calming measures (e.g., speed humps or chicanes) or repeater signs or roundel road markings at regular intervals, so that no point within a zone is more than 50m from such a feature. The beginning and end of a zone is indicated by terminal signs.

Sites will be assessed on a location-by-location basis using evidence and statistics to avoid a blanket 'roll out' at locations that may not be suitable.

The Department for Transport (DfT) circular 'Setting Local Speed Limits' 01/2013 (March 2024 revision) will be used as a key point of reference for the assessment process, whilst applying an evidence-led approach to ensure restrictions are appropriate for their environment.

2. Purpose

This policy for has been developed to deliver a consistent approach to the assessment and introduction of 20mph speed limits and zones throughout Cumberland. The policy intends to ensure speed restrictions are logical and suitable for their surroundings and is reflective of DfT's stance on 20mph limits.

3. Principles of Policy

Speed limits should be evidence-led, self-explaining and reinforce people's assessment of what is a safe speed to travel.

Successful 20 mph limits and 20 mph zones are generally self-enforcing, i.e., the existing conditions of the road together with measures such as traffic calming or signing, publicity and information as part of the scheme, lead to a mean traffic speed compliant with the speed limit. To achieve compliance there should be no expectation on the police to provide additional enforcement beyond their routine activity, unless this has been explicitly agreed.

Research into signed-only 20 mph speed limits shows that they generally lead to only small reductions in traffic speeds – less than 1mph on average. Signed-only 20 mph speed limits are therefore most appropriate for areas where vehicle speeds are already low. If the mean speed is already at or below 24 mph on a road, introducing a 20mph speed limit through signing alone is likely to lead to general compliance with the new speed limit.

Focus will be given to the introduction of signed only 20mph limits at locations where the required criteria are met. If clear justification is apparent, consideration will also be given to the introduction of traffic calming features to reduce speeds to a compliant level, however such a scheme would need to be funded separately.

The minimum length of a speed limit should generally be not less than 600m to avoid too many changes of speed limit along a route.

Speed limits should not be used to attempt to resolve the problem of isolated hazards such as a single road junction or reduced forward visibility, for example, at a bend. The full range of speed management measures will be considered before a new speed limit is introduced.

When considering reduced speed limits, the highway authority will take into account the impact on journey times for drivers and bus users, as well as the possible effect on air pollution.

4. Assessment Criteria

To meet the criteria for a 20mph speed limit or zone, a location must:

- have existing mean speeds throughout that provide a realistic opportunity for compliance (where existing mean speeds are at or below 24mph) or have clear justification that measures are required to lower vehicle speeds to such a level.
- be outside a school or where vulnerable road users frequently mix with vehicles, such as a town centre, or village with no footway provision.
- explain and justify the need for lower speed to the driver.

The key statistics and factors that will be analysed when assessing for a 20mph limit or zone include:

- existing traffic speeds
- history of collisions
- road geometry and engineering
- road function
- composition of road users (including existing and potential levels of vulnerable road users)
- road environment (urban/rural)

5. References and Further Reading

- DfT circular 'Setting Local Speed Limits' 01/2013 (March 2024 revision)
- Cumberland Council 'Traffic Regulation Orders' Policy
- Cumberland Council 'Consulting and Informing People' Policy