

A proposal to reduce the impact of increasing traffic on rural roads.

This documents proposes the introduction of quiet lanes on unclassified roads in the parishes of Sandford St Martin, Great Tew, Little Tew and the Wortons.

Map showing local villages, roads and speed limits



Source – Ordnance Survey Maps

Traffic on local roads

This document considers the rural roads framed by the classified roads of the A361, A44/A3400 A4260 and the parishes of The Wortons, Sandford St Martin and Ledwell, Great Tew, Little Tew, Heythrop and parts of Enstone. The classified roads are generally well maintained and have speed limits of 50 or 60 mph. The unclassified rural roads connecting local parishes and villages are narrow, poorly maintained and are regularly shared with pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders, much more than the classified roads. Some villages have 20mph, some do not. Given the increase in traffic on local roads it now seems incongruous and dangerous that speed limits on unclassified, narrow, poorly maintained roads have higher speed limits than classified roads. Given the width of the unclassified roads and the number of potholes drivers and other road users generally occupy the centre of the road and passing other road users is problematic. Whilst the number of reported accidents is small, the number of minor accidents and damage to vehicles is increasing.

The rationale for the higher speed limit on rural roads is that an unclassified road is defined as one that is of very low significance to traffic and is of only very local importance. Further, by making the roads “national limit”, 60mph for single lane roads, it means that repeater signs are not needed, reducing signage on local roads in the interest of maintaining a rural character, an important consideration for many residents. However, the assumption that these roads are of only very local importance is no longer tenable:

- Traffic volumes have increased significantly and will increase further as a result of planning decisions that will potentially make this area a major tourist destination with traffic volumes potentially reaching similar levels to Woodstock.
- The rate of accidents on these roads is disproportionate to the overall rate of accidents on the broader road network within Oxfordshire.
- The roads are deteriorating faster because of increasing traffic volumes, in effect narrowing the road to all users. Recurring issues are potholes, failing edges of the roads, poor drainage and over-hanging hedges and trees. These issues force drivers and other road users towards the centre of the road, effectively making roads single track in parts.
- Road safety is a priority for Oxfordshire County Council, but the majority of spend and initiatives on this are focused on urban roads with little relevant actions for rural roads, that are, statistically, more dangerous than urban roads.

This is a problem impacting many other rural parishes and communities. There are number of initiatives being proposed, tried and deployed to try and manage traffic on unclassified rural roads and mitigate the risks of accidents to all road users. These include:

- The Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions in its Ninth Report proposed that C and unclassified roads should have a speed limit of 40pmh. They stated that “We recommend that guidance to local authorities indicate that 40 mph be the speed limit on C and Unclassified roads. Research should be undertaken into the best ways of enforcing such a limit.”
- A campaign across some parish councils to try and get a change to the highway code so that the national speed limit definition is amended to indicate that rural, unclassified roads without central markings, should have a lower speed limit of 40mph.
- The introduction of Quiet Lanes, a scheme promoted by the Campaign for Rural England.
- The NFU campaign for rural road safety.

Traffic Volumes

An unclassified road is generally defined as one that is of very low significance to traffic and is of only very local importance. Local importance includes consideration of all local road users, including pedestrians, cyclists and equestrian traffic.

This definition of our local roads may have once held true. Prior to 2015 traffic surveys of local roads reported traffic of approx. 1800 average daily traffic movements. The last published traffic surveys for the same roads, from 2023, reported approx. 3000 average daily traffic movements, an increase of over two thirds.

This increase is in large part a result of the opening of Soho Farmhouse as a material tourist attraction. There has been no significant increase in housing stock or other businesses in the area, except for the expansion of the Alpine Formal One team. It is reasonable to assume traffic along most local roads has increased in a similar manner to the traffic survey results, particularly Ledwell Lane as this is the final approach to Soho Farmhouse for all visitors. Ledwell Lane is an unclassified road, narrow, approx. 4m in many places, suffers from many potholes, particular at the edge of the road, it has limited verges and has a blind bend close to Great Tew Park. The road is shared between motorists, cyclists, pedestrians, both on foot and in wheelchair, and horse riders. The continuing expansion of Soho Farmhouse and the planning approval for the Mullin Museum will potentially increase traffic movements by a further 100%, as outlined in the traffic survey submitted with the planning applications for the Mullin Museum. As a product of these two developments, Ledwell Lane and other local roads are no longer of “low significance and only of very local importance”. They have become critical routes for major new tourist attractions.

However, the roads have not and will not be maintained to reflect this. At the same time the “rural character” is being eroded by more road signs related to this commercial businesses. For example, the road to Soho Farmhouse has been carpeted with road signs to try and manage traffic and alert road users that the road is shared with other road users. However, no similar consideration has been made for the surrounding roads, that are shared much more with other road users. Further, residents are frustrated by the increase in minor accidents, broken wheels, broken wing mirrors and minor damage to parked cars and property and the increase in noise resulting from the increase in traffic volumes.

There has been engagement from OCC Highways regarding maintenance of some roads. This is very welcome and will hopefully improve things. However, the process is reactive and dependent on the level of engagement of local parish councils. As some parishes do not have councils their input or considerations are easily missed.

Traffic Accidents

Oxfordshire County Council reports that there are 4200 km of roads across the county. Each year, on these roads, there are an estimated 30,000 collisions of all types. In 2021 there were 1051 reported injury collisions including 18 deaths, 225 serious injuries and 808 slight injuries. These figures include accidents and injuries to all road users, including pedestrians. (Source Oxfordshire County Council Road Traffic Collisions - Casualty Data Summary 2021). In practice, it is known from various national studies using information from insurers and the NHS that quite a large number of injury collisions – especially those involving a single road-user and resulting in only minor injuries – are not reported to the police. It is therefore acknowledged that the actual number of collisions and injuries on our roads is considerably higher.

The general trend of road accidents and injuries has fallen over the years, but the number of more serious accidents has not fallen in line with the general trend. The diagram on the following page shows crash data, taken from www.crashmap.co.uk, from 10 years from 2013 to 2022 for the local roads considered in this report. In 2014 there were 20 accidents. This has fallen in line with county wide data to 12 in 2022, albeit the later years include the lockdown periods when traffic volumes fell substantially. Whilst the reduction in collisions is encouraging, the number of accidents should be lower, given the limited length of roads and the volume of traffic. This supports data from the Department of Transport that rural roads are more dangerous than urban roads and motorways. They report that 60% of fatalities occur on country roads, that 25% of drivers report having had a near miss on a country road and 40% have been surprised by an unexpected hazard on a country road such as an animal. NFU Mutual reports similar issues, stating that in 2023 the number of lives lost on rural roads was 70% higher than on urban highways and collisions on rural roads were around four times more likely to result in a fatality than on an urban one.

Oxfordshire County Council in June 2022 adopted a ‘Vision Zero’ commitment to eliminate all fatalities and severe injuries on Oxfordshire’s roads and streets by 2050 and to have a safer, healthier, and more equitable mobility for all. To achieve this the council has committed to work closely with partners and stakeholders to take a whole system approach, working together on infrastructure, behaviour, technology and legislation to achieve this change.

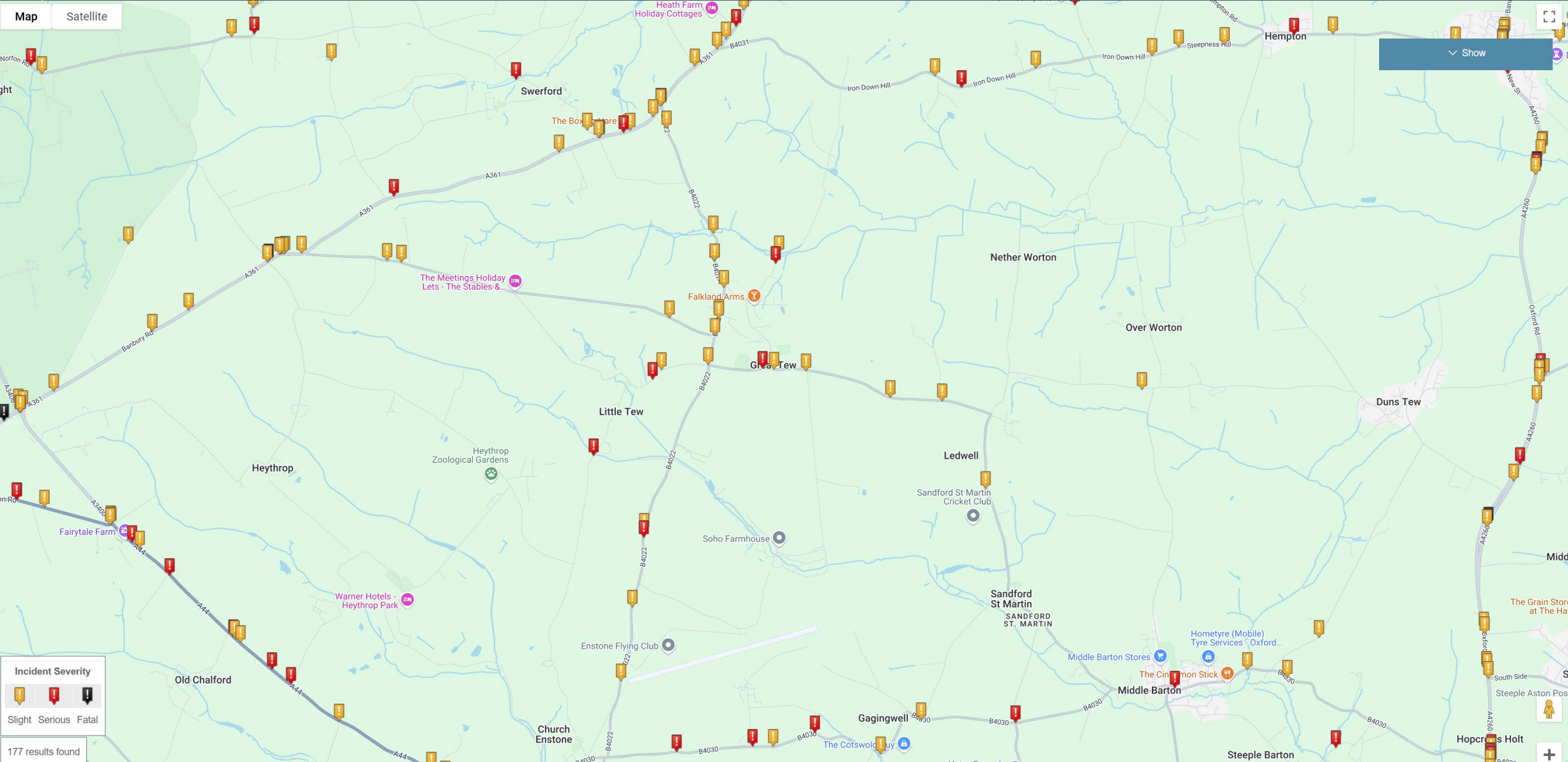
The council published its plans for Vision Zero in January 2024 in a report titled “Oxfordshire – Safe Roads through Vision Zero to 2030”. Some relevant points from the report include:

- A commitment to conduct a wider speed limit review across our road network. This review will include considering routes with inconsistent speed limits and rural roads or roads between towns.
- That speed limits alone will not reduce vehicle speeds. Lower speed limits need to be accompanied by measures to improve compliance such as enforcement, road design improvements and road safety education.
- Clear and clean signage helps to remind drivers of the speed limit and impact compliance.

However, across the report little focus is given to rural roads and the disproportionate risks and rates of accidents.

Crashes on local roads, 10 years 2013 - 2022

Map Satellite



Incident Severity

- Slight
- Serious
- Fatal

177 results found

What can be done?

Residents would like to see something done to mitigate the impacts of increased traffic volumes. There does not seem to be widespread support for more road signage, traffic calming measures or other manifest traffic management schemes. Residents value and want to conserve the rural nature of the local roads. But they would like to feel safer when using the roads, either as a driver, cyclist or pedestrian and they believe Soho Farmhouse and the Mullin Museum should be more active and engaged in managing the impact of traffic on local villages and roads.

There are number of potential measures that could be taken forward in response:

- It would be helpful to understand more about the OCC plans for Vision Zero and specifically what is planned our could be considered for rural roads.
- Under Vision Zero a Quiet Lanes pilot could be conducted within the area to assess its impact and value
- Work with Soho, Mullin and Alpine F1 to ensure visitors are aware of the dangers of rural roads and respect the local villages and towns. For example, they could promote the NFU code for countryside users to their visitors and remind their visitors of highway code rule 218 regarding Quiet Lanes. Their engagement is an important part of the continued promotion and self-policing of quiet lanes.

What are Quiet Lanes (Taken from CPRE's guide to Quiet Lanes)

The Quiet Lanes initiative forms part of CPRE's Safer Country Lanes campaign. This seeks to protect country lanes and villages from the adverse effects of speeding traffic by calling for lower speed limits and widespread designation of Quiet Lanes.

Quiet Lanes are minor rural roads, typically C or unclassified routes, which have been designated by local highway authorities to pay special attention to the needs of walkers, cyclists, horse riders and other vulnerable road users, and to offer protection from speeding traffic. Measures such as lower speed limits and discrete road signs aim to encourage drivers to slow down and be considerate to more vulnerable users who can in turn use and enjoy country lanes in greater safety, with less threat from speeding traffic.

Measures can be taken to help deliver the aims of Quiet Lanes, but these should be in keeping with the local character of the area. Examples include varying verge maintenance, soft landscaping, removal of road signs, road surface treatments or even planting grass in the middle of the road. Traditional traffic calming measures such as speed cushions, humps and high visibility signs are often more appropriate to urban areas. Quiet Lanes should be designed to protect and enhance the local character and distinctiveness of the countryside. Signs should, therefore, be discrete whilst indicating clearly to road users that they are in a Quiet Lane. Signs should neither detract from, nor clutter, the countryside.

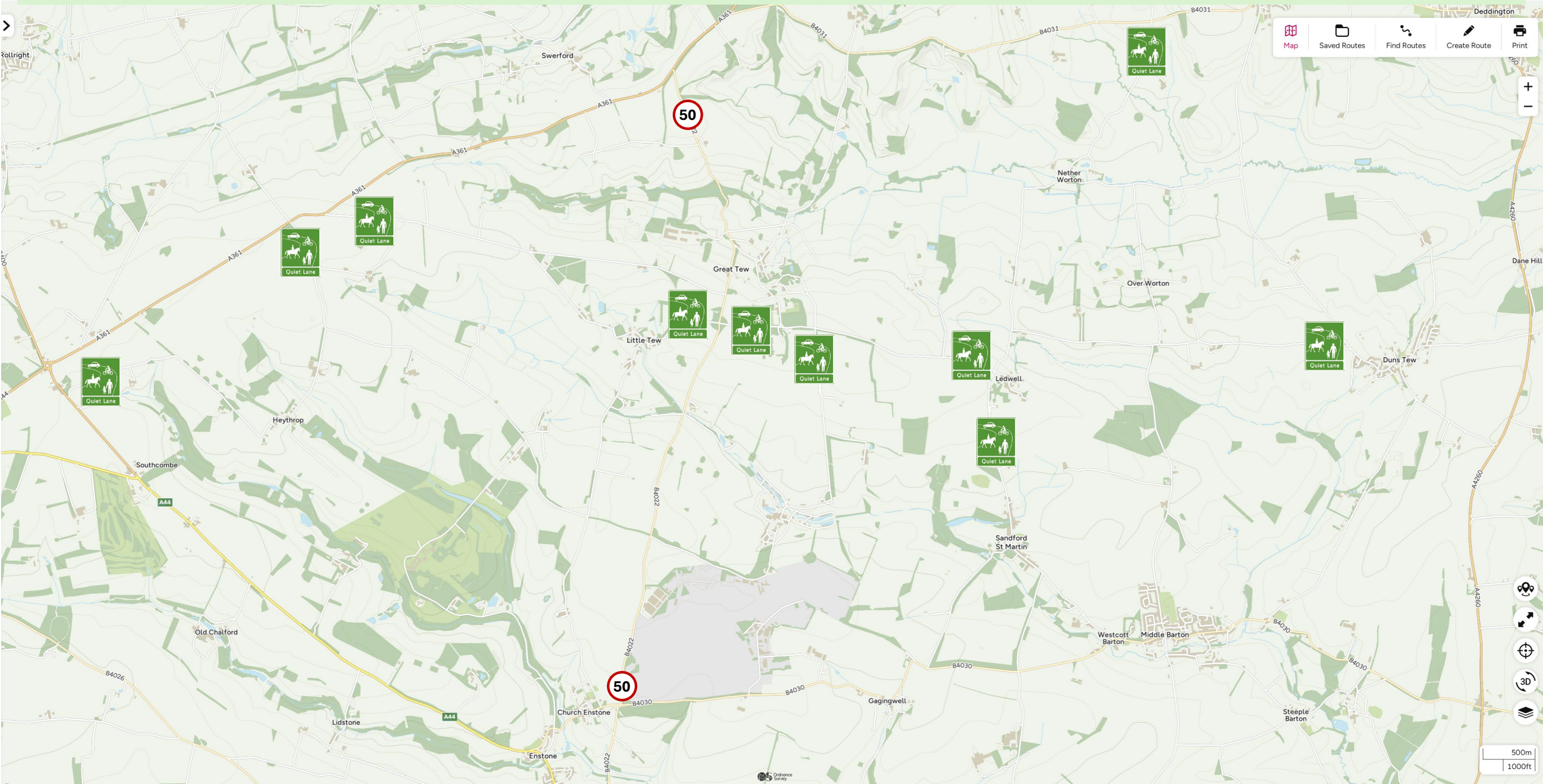
Quiet Lanes are essentially self-enforcing. Enforcement largely depends on advertising the Quiet Lanes and maintaining public awareness about their purpose. This requires a continuous programme of promotion in order that all in the community and visitors to the area know the Quiet Lanes exist and what they are seeking to achieve.

Following CPRE's campaigning, the Transport Act 2000 gave legal status to the term Quiet Lane. The Act enables local authorities to designate roads for which they are responsible as Quiet Lanes.

Highway Code Rule 218 - Home Zones and Quiet Lanes. These are places where people could be using the whole of the road for a range of activities such as children playing or for a community event. You should drive slowly and carefully and be prepared to stop to allow people extra time to make space for you to pass them in safety.



Proposed Quiet Lanes



The map above shows potential placement of Quiet Lane signs and where some missing speed signs along the B4022 are needed. In many cases the signs could be attached to existing speed signs.