

## Location, Location, Location

Here's a conundrum: in an age of sophisticated, readily available satellite navigation systems and road maps in all shapes and sizes, it's never been easier to find your way from A to B. Yet conversely, knowing exactly where you are along the way can be much more difficult. The A361 North Devon link road is a particular case in point - the source of a riddle where an effective solution to a straightforward problem has proven frustratingly elusive.

Devon's Country Mile partnership involves, amongst others, the Devon and Cornwall Police, the Devon and Somerset Fire service, West Country Ambulance service and Devon County Council. Funded by the Department for Transport, and using everything from instinct to research to engineering - and a range of historic and newly gathered data - the Group is developing, implementing and assessing innovative yet practical ways of improving rural road safety. Road users across a wide area of mid and north Devon are already benefiting from this work, with much time invested by Country Mile partners in improving safety on the A361 North Devon Link.

This is a road with a chequered collision history, including some high-profile incidents involving serious injuries - and several fatalities. With the project's help, newly available real-time data is now delivering a clear picture showing close following, excessive speed and weather conditions as ongoing contributory factors. Though even Government money can't change the weather, better communication and information is helping drivers understand the issues, while investments in clearer signing and lining and more consistent speed limit enforcement are also improving safety.

Even so, incidents remain inevitable, bringing Country Mile partners back to what had become a 20 year old riddle. When something goes wrong on this 40 mile stretch of weather-beaten, heavily trafficked road, emergency service reaction is usually triggered through calls from drivers on the scene. But its 1980's construction means it's almost completely devoid of the landmarks, ancient or modern - often pubs - which elsewhere have gradually turned the average British main road into a uniquely identifiable tapestry. On the lonely, largely blank-canvas A361, location by instinct isn't easy, with much valuable time lost over the years by emergency services simply tracking down incidents.

That riddle has finally been solved - through lateral thinking in a Country Mile brainstorming session. There happen to be 42 lay-bys on the A361 - at least one for every mile, far more than on any other Devon road - so a plan emerged to give them all names, providing the resulting list to emergency service controllers and vehicle recovery operators. Geographical features have thus lent names ranging from the vaguely romantic, such as 'Magpie's Rest,' to the uncomfortably eerie - such as 'Gibbets Moor' - so now, emergency service crews can rest easier, knowing that, when a call comes in, incident locations can finally be pinpointed to within a mile.

Hopefully its just coincidence that 'Hares Down Moor' is uncomfortably close to a recently installed Police observation platform....