

## What's in a name?

In Devon, the A361 is a forty mile stretch of rural single carriageway connecting Tiverton and Barnstaple, known locally - if not affectionately - as the 'North Devon Link'. Built in the 1980's and skirting the fringes of Exmoor, it carries a wide ranging mix of traffic across a mostly featureless landscape, on which wayside cafes, filling stations, villages and even junctions are noticeably absent. The road is unusual for another reason: with 40 lay-bys, drivers have more opportunities to break their journey than on any other Devon 'A' road - yet only a few take advantage. Most seem lulled into a sense of security through wide carriageways, sweeping curves and vast skylines, bringing an overriding temptation to press on rapidly to journey's end, leaving this characterless plain behind. The road has amassed a certain reputation hereabouts: there have been several high profile speeding incidents, a number of fatal collisions, and yet others involving serious or slight injuries. Police and County records show weather and speed are often factors, though they are not alone: tailgating and tiredness also play a part.

All are principal reasons the A361 lies within Devon's Country Mile project area, where, aided by Department for Transport funding, work is well underway to improve rural road safety in new, innovative ways. On the A361, improvements range from the straightforward, like improved signing and lining, to the controversial - such as new police observation platforms. Occasionally, however, lateral thinking and quite limited investment bring surprisingly far-reaching benefits.

Fire and Rescue, Police and ambulance Services invariably need rapid access to the scene of incidents - making accurate location information vital. Here, the North Devon Link Road has long presented a dilemma, for, lacking the usual features by which most of us informally navigate - the pubs, petrol stations, and main road junctions - drivers reporting anything from carriageway obstructions to serious multi-vehicle collisions aren't always sure exactly where they are. This whole issue was raised at a Country Mile brainstorming session, leading to one of those rare but golden 'why-didn't-we think-of-that-before' moments. Suddenly, someone suggested simply naming those forty lay-bys...

A budget of just £5000 covered the work, though there remained the problem of finding names for 40 isolated lay-bys on a featureless road. The irony was not lost on Project Manager Simon Chapman: "We talked for ages, and eventually just got out the maps and picked local landmarks and so on," he says with a wry smile. Names ranging from the sublime to the eerie were selected: the origins of 'Webbery Copse' are unmistakable, but 'Gibbet Moor' risks a shiver down the spine on a dark, moonless night, and arguments about exactly how to pronounce 'Hacche' lay-by will surely linger long after an incident is forgotten...

Control centres at the Highways Agency, the County Council, Police, Ambulance, Fire and Rescue services already have maps to pin-point locations on Devon's A361. Now the opportunity is being extended to breakdown service operators, to help ease the task of finding stranded vehicles on the A361 between Tiverton and Barnstaple.