

31st August 2020

FACTS

**“No good model ever accounted for *all* the facts,
since some data was bound to be misleading, if not plain wrong.”**

James Dewey Watson, Quoting Francis Crick in ‘Some Mad Pursuit’

20mph signs have appeared in our village and, indeed, all over East Lothian. It’s an attempt by the Council to reduce accidents, and in Edinburgh, *Twenty’s Plenty* arrangements have been in place for several years. However, a 2018 report – *20 mph Research Study* – commissioned by the Department of Transport and prepared by ‘Atkins’, ‘AECOM’ and Professor Mike Maher of University College London, raises some questions. In the “Executive Summary” of the 68-page report there is this:

Overall findings: The evidence available ... shows no significant change in the short term in collisions and casualties, in the majority of the case studies ... There is some evidence to suggest a positive impact in one location (Brighton Phase 1), where a blanket 20mph limit was introduced ... [indicating] a statistically significant change in collisions and casualties relative to the 30mph comparator area. [But] this represents just one case study, and the extent to which the findings are transferable to other locations is unclear ... Further data is required.

I’m sure the good folk at East Lothian Council considered this before they made their 20mph ruling. But ... “further data is required”, perhaps?

“Get your facts right” we’re told before we pontificate, or make a decision, or come to a judgement. I once had a phone-call from a man whose speech was slurred. I told him bluntly I wasn’t going to engage in conversation till he was sober. I discovered next day that he was recovering from a slight stroke. He never accepted my apology. *F.A.C.T.S.* is the acronym for the Scottish Government’s Covid-19 guidance. (See <https://www.gov.scot/publications>) So, one way or another, facts matter!

We’ll never have all the facts we need. Some might be misleading or plain wrong. But at least we can *try* to gather the relevant information before we do or say anything. 20mph may be OK if it’s based on the correct facts. But don’t let’s forget the “further data required” issue too!

A prayer for today

*Lord, when I make a judgement, let it be informed by the fact
that love matters above all else. Amen.*

An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon

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