

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the Highways Committee held at the County Hall, Durham on **Wednesday 10 October 2007 at 10.00 a.m.**

Present:

Councillor H Douthwaite in the Chair

Members:

Councillors C Carr, Davies, E Foster, Gray, Holroyd, Hunter, Knox, Manton, Mason, Meir, Morgan, Pendlebury, Pye, Robson, Southwell, Tennant, and Young.

Other Members:

Councillors Chapman, Coates, Freeman, Martin, Shuttleworth, and Simmons.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bell, and Walker.

A1 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2007 were agreed as correct and signed by the Chairman.

A2 Consideration of Prohibition of Driving, Seasonal Gating Scheme, Stanhope Ford

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director, Environment regarding the installation of two lockable forestry type 'boom' gates either side of Stanhope Ford, to prevent vehicles from using the ford during the winter months between 1 October and 31 March (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Committee then heard the following representation:-

Mr M Dunn, Fire Safety Officer with County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service advised of the service's support for the proposals. He advised that following a water incident in Manchester in 1999 where a fire fighter was killed, systems had been put in place where fire services are now able to react to incidents such as at Stanhope Ford. He pointed out however that much depends upon the level of water, and in high water the risk to the public, the RAF rescue team, and the fire service is very high.

Since 2000 there had been 32 incidents at Stanhope Ford, 22 of which had been during the period 1 October to 31 March. Seven incidents had been of a type where the risk had been extremely dangerous and had involved the public, fire fighters and other emergency response teams. He pointed out that where an incident involves water, the risk is instant, and the response that could be made by the rescue teams in such hazards would be extremely limited.

The Corporate Director, Environment advised that there is the desire locally to keep the ford open, and that in the summer time it is a tourist attraction. The intention was to keep the ford open in the summer at first and to monitor the situation. He pointed out that the stepping stones could still be used by pedestrians in the winter.

Councillor Shuttleworth, the Local Member, advised that they have tried every method to stop these incidents from happening and that these proposals are supported as a last resort. Ideally he would like to see people prosecuted, however, failing other methods from being suitable, the proposal was supported.

Councillor Southwell suggested that it was a serious hazard and due to the health and safety risk it should not be kept open for tourists. He asked if officers could advise of the distance vehicles would have to travel if this was closed. He requested that the ford be closed permanently as he believed it to be dangerous during the summer as well as the winter. He suggested that the Committee defer making a decision until they had viewed the site to assess the risks.

Councillor Shuttleworth advised that local people wished for the ford to be kept open during the summer.

The Corporate Director, Environment advised that there had been many meetings about the ford which had included both the District and Parish Councils and he could not see what more could be gained from having a further meeting. He pointed out that the matter had been under consideration for some time. He advised Members of the signs that would be used to show that the ford would be closed, and the diversion that motorists would make. The alternative route was shown on the plan included with the report. He explained that they could close the ford in the summer however they were seeking to find the right balance. The Committee was reminded that the vast majority of incidents at the ford had been during the winter time.

Councillor Pendlebury advised that he would not like to see the ford closed permanently, and that it is a tourist attraction to the area. He believed that the surface of the road in the ford had deteriorated. He questioned whether the stepping stones could be used in the winter.

In response the Corporate Director, Environment advised that the stepping stones could be used by pedestrians during the winter in suitable conditions. As far as he was aware there had been no pedestrian related incidents.

Councillor Davies advised of his support for the recommendations in the report. He questioned whether there would be the option to close the barriers during the summer if the river was high.

The Corporate Director, Environment advised that the Order that would be made was for a six month period, however the police have powers to close the barriers if they believed it to be dangerous.

Councillor Knox questioned how they would deal with pedestrians crossing the ford during high water and suggested that there should be notices to warn the public not to use the stepping stones when the river was high.

The Corporate Director, Environment advised that in addition to the signs to be used as shown in the report, together with there being gauges either side of the river which showed the height of the river, the public would be expected to use their common sense as to whether to cross the ford.

Councillor Southwell pointed out that not everyone's first language is English, and therefore they may be unable to read the signs. He moved a motion for the Committee to defer making a decision until they had made a site visit to look at the issues.

Councillor E Foster pointed out that the public would be able to look at the river and assess its dangers.

In response Councillor Southwell advised that the river may be subject to a flash flood.

The Corporate Director, Environment explained that the use of multi-lingual signs is a national issue, and that there would be many other places where not being able to read a sign could cause difficulty.

Resolved:

The Committee endorsed the proposal to set aside the objection, proceed with the scheme and monitor the situation.

A3 B6291 The Avenue, Coxhoe- Traffic Calming

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director, Environment regarding the proposal to install traffic calming cushions and a priority give way with build out on the B6291 The Avenue, Coxhoe (for copy see file of Minutes).

Councillor Morgan, the Local Member, advised that the scheme has widespread support in the community, and has been discussed for a long time.

Resolved:

The Committee endorsed the proposal to set aside the objections and proceed with the scheme as proposed.