

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Highways Committee** held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Tuesday 21 February 2012 at 10.00 am**

Present:

Councillor G Bleasdale (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Robinson (Vice-Chairman), B Arthur, A Bainbridge, D Burn, N Foster, S Hugill, A Naylor, P Stradling, T Taylor, L Thomson, R Todd, E Tomlinson, J Turnbull and R Young

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Hancock, D Marshall, J Maslin, J Shiell, C Woods and A Wright

Also Present:

Councillor J Blakey, A Savory and J Shuttleworth

1 Minutes of the meetings held on 20 December 2011 and 2 February 2012

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 December 2011 and 2 February 2012 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2 Declarations of interest, if any

There were no declarations of interest in relation to the item of business on the agenda.

3 Stanhope Ford - Report of Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director, Regeneration and Economic Development which detailed a proposed Prohibition of Driving Traffic Order to prevent all vehicles from using Stanhope Ford on the grounds of safety (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Strategic Highways Manager provided the Committee with the background to the proposal and explained that at its meeting held on 28 June 2011, the Highways Committee endorsed a proposal to appoint an inspector to hold a public inquiry to consider representations for and against the closure of the Ford to all vehicles. This was to ensure that all representations could be considered in their entirety, rather than subjected to any procedure the Highways Committee would have to undertake. The non-statutory public inquiry subsequently took place over three days in January 2012.

Evidence had been provided by a range of experts and local people throughout the inquiry which had culminated in a report from the Inspector which outlined the advantages and disadvantages of the proposal to close the Ford.

The Committee were informed that there had been a number of incidents reported over the past ten years of motorists becoming stranded when attempting to traverse the ford during adverse weather conditions. There was a continued risk that motorists would persist to use the Ford during adverse weather conditions and Emergency Services had expressed concern at the level of risk in dealing with such incidents. The County Council could not accept anything but a 100% guaranteed workable solution given that lives were potentially being put at risk.

The Committee were informed that the conclusion of the inquiry was that, on balance, the public safety benefits of making an order to close the Ford outweighed the objections which had been raised. Should the proposals be approved, the Order could be rescinded in the future through an agreed process.

Access on foot via the stepping stones upstream of the Ford would remain and continue to be maintained by the Council. The Ford bed would also be available recreationally during the summer months.

In response to the concerns of a Motoring Club, who used the Ford on an annual basis for car rallies, the Strategic Highways Manager informed the Committee that both the Council and the Inspector had not ruled out the option of this event and other possible events taking place. However, full discussions with the organisers of any weekend festivals would need to take place.

Councillor Shuttleworth spoke in objection to the proposal as a local Member, raising concerns about the cost of the public inquiry and the lack of consultation with the Fire and Rescue Service. He stated that he had received correspondence from the Fire Brigade Community Services Team who had indicated that they would be prepared to lock the Ford gates at any time. In addition, he said that the people of Weardale were not in objection to the gates being locked during Winter months, however, local people wished to use the Ford during the summer months and by not closing the gates during the summer months would prevent any impact on local tourism.

The Strategic Highways Manager responded stating that the public inquiry cost was substantiated as it was necessary in ensuring that the people of Stanhope had every opportunity to respond in full to the proposal. The Fire and Rescue Service had been consulted and had confirmed their support for the proposals, based on the outcome of the public inquiry. It was felt that it was unfeasible to rely upon a person being available to close the Ford gates at any one time and the possible effects on tourism were far outweighed by the level of public safety.

Councillor Savory, local Member, spoke in objection to the proposal and outlined her main concern as the effect on residents and visitors of Stanhope. Councillor Savory felt that all options had not been explored and suggested that some form of barrier system should be considered before any decision on closure was made.

In response, the Strategic Highways Manager confirmed that a barrier system had been explored, however the system explored was used primarily as a flood defence and not to stop traffic.

A number of Members considered that the actions of a minority of people who had inappropriately traversed the Ford in adverse weather conditions should not result in it being closed, however, they acknowledged the concerns of the inspector that it was in the interests of public safety to close the Ford and that this was one of the most pivotal deciding factors.

In response to comments expressed from the Committee, the Strategic Highways Manager confirmed that another Traffic Regulation Order would be needed to rescind the proposal if any workable solutions were found. The Fire and Rescue Services had not specifically requested the closure of the Ford, but rather a complete prevention of incidents; however notwithstanding the action that had been taken was as a result of concerns received from Emergency Services. There were no mechanisms for motorists to be held responsible for their own actions, such as a fixed penalty or fine and the way in which modern cars were manufactured meant that incidents of cars breaking down were more common, even at lower water levels. The Inspectors findings had made it clear that any future incidents may not always result in successful outcomes.

Resolved

The Committee noted the findings and recommendations of the Planning Inspector and that the Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services be authorised to proceed with a Traffic Regulation Order to introduce a 'Prohibition of Driving' to close Stanhope Ford to vehicular traffic.

4 B6277 Speed Limit Review - Report of Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services

The Strategic Highways Manager informed the Committee that proposals would need to be deferred until further notice, as there was a possibility of a compromise agreement being reached in regard to an objection to the proposals.

5 Rockingham Drive, Bishop Auckland - Traffic Calming - Report of Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services in relation to the proposed traffic calming measures at Rockingham Drive, Bishop Auckland (for copy see file of Minutes).

The proposal was to introduce traffic calming measures in the form of three speed tables at the junctions of Rockingham Drive and Lindisfarne Close, Whitby Close, and Middlehope Grove.

The Strategic Highways Manager informed the Committee that a statutory consultation had taken place which had resulted in 18 objections submitted by residents of, and residents who lived on the various streets accessed from, Rockingham Drive. In addition, there had been a significant amount of support, which included a total of 185 residents in favour of the proposal. There had been one reported accident resulting in slight personal

injury on this route as a result of a vehicular collision and it was considered appropriate to introduce traffic calming measures. There would be a risk that some motorists attempt to increase their speed in between the traffic calming measures and therefore a minimum of three speed tables were being recommended.

The Committee were advised that a number of representations by email had been received and these were summarised by the Strategic Highways Manager. Many points raised in the representations received by email related to wintry weather and possible conditions on the route. The Committee were advised that the route would be salt treated during winter, and in the event of the road becoming snowbound, any motorists would be able to make a judgement on whether they could manoeuvre their vehicle. In response to comments received about 'giving way' at a junction, the Committee were informed that there was enough room for a vehicle to sit comfortably on top of the speed table before giving way at a junction.

One respondent suggested the use of chicanes as an alternative but these had been explored, but were not deemed to be suitable.

Resolved

The Committee noted the findings and recommendations of the Planning Inspector and that the Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services be authorised to proceed with a Traffic Regulation Order to introduce a 'Prohibition of Driving' to close Stanhope Ford to vehicular traffic.

6 Such other business, as in the opinion of the Chairman of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration