

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Highways Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Monday 7 October 2013 at 9.30 am.**

Present:

Councillor C Kay in the Chair

Members of the Committee

Councillors J Allen, B Armstrong, D Bell, H Bennett, O Gunn, D Hicks, K Hopper, O Milburn, S Morrison, R Ormerod, J Robinson, P Stradling, R Todd, J Turnbull and M Wilkes

Also Present:

Councillor K Dearden

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G Bleasdale and D Hall.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members present.

3 Minutes of the meetings held on 4, 8 and 27 July 2013

The minutes of the meetings held on 4, 8 and 27 July were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4 Declarations of interest

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

5 Proposed Traffic Regulation Orders relating to the re-opening of the northern end of Stanley front Street to vehicular traffic

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director, Regeneration and Economic Development relating to objections received to a scheme which would see the re-opening of the northern end of Stanley Front Street to vehicular traffic (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Committee received a presentation from the Strategic Highways Manager which illustrated the existing layout of the area and photographs depicting various views of Front Street and the immediate surrounding area.

The scheme had been developed in conjunction with the Stanley Masterplan, agreed in 2012. The area was a key location identified in the plan for improvement with particular emphasis on vehicular entry, parking access and pedestrian movements. The scheme would see the creation of a new slip road together with additional parking. The introduction of disabled and short stay parking would improve custom to local businesses and facilities. Buildings would have servicing that they didn't have at present and there would be increased parking provision within easy reach of the town centre.

Following extensive consultation, 22 objections had been received. Twelve of the objectors lived in the area immediately affected by the scheme, five lived in the wider Stanley area and the remaining five were anonymous. Details of the objections were summarised in the report and centred around the opening up/junction of Front Street/Thorneyholme Terrace, the one-way system and parking issues.

The Strategic Highways Manager commented that in addition to these objections, a petition had been circulated in the wider community which contained around 180 signatures formally recording objections to the proposals to open the Front Street, Stanley outside St. Joseph's Roman Catholic School. This had not been received by the County Council and had instead, been sent to the Department for Transport based in Newcastle. The confusion had arisen due to a separate consultation taking place in the area by the Department for Transport, which related to the scheme.

Councillor K Dearden, one of the local Councillors for the area informed the Committee that she had no objections to the proposals as the area was in desperate need of regeneration.

The Committee then heard representations from the Chair and Vice-Chair of Governors from St. Joseph's RC School, summarised as follows:

The school actively supported the master plan, the vision and fully understood the need to revitalise and improve the attractiveness of the town centre whilst increasing accessibility. However, they did not wish for this to be at the expense of the safety of their pupils. The school were unaware of any vehicle collisions in 27 years of school life; 'no waiting' signs would ease and alleviate parking and it was felt that the scheme would simply encourage parking outside the school gates which would create difficulties and dangers for school children.

The school had met with Council officials to discuss safety issues and had proposed a number of modifications which included:

- lowering/strengthening the school wall;
- the creation of disabled/push chair access at the Front Street gate;
- an extended paved area outside of the gate;
- a barrier immediately outside of the School entrance and extending along the street;
- speed humps outside of Elite buildings;
- a narrowed road directly outside of the School gate;
- a table T-junction at the junction of Thorneyholme Terrace and Front Street.

Whilst the modifications were welcomed, there had been an expectation for the installation of at least one pedestrian crossing at the junction of Thorneyholme Terrace and Front

Street, with further speed humps together with a designated reduced speed zone in the area.

Concerns had also been expressed about the timing of the consultation process, given that the formal consultation period had ran from 25 July to 15 August 2013. This had coincided with the school summer holidays and it was felt that the proposals had gone under the radar of parents. Since the school had re-opened for the new term in September, parents had expressed their serious concerns about the scheme and were overwhelmingly against the proposals put forward. The general consensus being that the introduction of traffic outside the school gates would pose a serious threat to the safety of children. Their strength of feeling had culminated in the launch of the aforementioned petition against the proposals which had gained much support in the local community.

The current entrance to St Joseph's was located on a pleasant, pedestrianised street which allowed pupils and parents alike to congregate in the area safely. The Front Street entrance to the School had not changed for many years. The wall surrounding the Front Street yard was a very old stone built wall. The entrance to the yard was very narrow with a number of steps. As such, it was simply inaccessible for parents with prams and push chairs or disabled visitors. This meant that those falling into that category waited for their children outside of the School gate on the current pedestrianised street.

Both parents and pupils could congregate comfortably and safely to socialise when the School day finished and positively impacted on the Front Street and local businesses. Parents used the local shops as part of the school run. This would diminish if the School was effectively situated on a 'rat run' where people could no longer gather safely.

The Strategic Highways Manager informed the Committee that the consultation had not been timed to coincide with the school holidays. The pre-consultation carried out in May and June was the wider, intense consultation that took place prior to the more statutory formal adverts which were issued throughout July and August.

He advised the Committee that the scheme would not jeopardise the safety of children, and measures such as the inclusion of traffic calming, guardrails and wide footways would assist in this regard. In terms of the possible 20mph speed limit, the Strategic Highways Manager confirmed that this could be incorporated into the scheme in line with the Committee's wishes.

The Committee then heard representations from a Ward Councillor from Stanley Town Council who was speaking as an individual and not on behalf of the Town Council. As a resident of Stanley for 66 years he supported the representations made by St. Joseph's RC School. In his opinion, the one-way route proposed in the scheme was at fault and suggested a revised route, which would include extra space for parking in Thorneyholme Terrace, for residents and parents.

The Strategic Highways Manager informed the Committee that the effects of the alternative proposal would not materially change the impact to the school as presented in the proposal.

The Committee then heard from a local resident of Thorneyholme Terrace who commented that traffic in the area appeared light. Many of the cars parked during the

week were attributable to staff from the local Jobcentre. Access to the buildings at present were via a slip road where vehicles could load and unload. He considered that parents should be able to collect their children up without fear and felt that the scheme should not be progressed during the current financial climate.

Councillor Stradling felt a certain degree of sympathy for the school and sought confirmation as to how many pupils were on the school roll. The Chair of Governors commented that it would likely to be around 200. Councillor Stradling indicated that if that were the case it would be imperative for a 20mph speed limit to be introduced together with possible parking restrictions.

Councillor Wilkes commented that there was no indication in relation to the cost of the project and on hearing the representations made, felt that there were more negative aspects to the scheme than positives.

Upon a vote being taken, it was

Resolved

That the recommendations contained in the report be agreed, together with the inclusion of a 20 mph speed limit in the immediate area.

6 Loss of open space objections relating to the sale of land adjacent to The Todner, Front Street, Dipton

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Spatial Policy, Planning, Assets and the Environment regarding the potential disposal of open space land for private garden use adjacent to The Todner, Front Street, Dipton (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Committee were informed that objections had been received to the proposed disposal following an encroachment on Council land. The loss of open space was acceptable under planning policy and was approved on 10 October 2012. Following this approval, in accordance with relevant legislation the loss of open space was advertised within the local media which had resulted in a number of objections.

The objections raised centred around the loss of an area for amenity use and cited that the outlook for residents nearby would be affected. There was also an objection that the land had been fenced off without the Council's permission and concerns had been expressed about the process that had been followed.

The Committee listened to representations from one of the local members, Councillor Alderson. A number of residents in Dipton had contacted him about the erection of the fence. At the time of querying the erection of the fence there had been an enquiry regarding the possible purchase of the land but at that time, nothing had been processed. The nearby, 'Delight Court', some sheltered accommodation, previously looked out onto the open land, however this had now been obstructed because of the fencing off of the area.

The applicant informed the Committee that the request to purchase the land had been made in January 2011. The land had become overgrown with bushes. In addition to this it was a common occurrence for rubble to be dumped on the land and it also attracted fly-

tipping. The fire brigade had been called to extinguish fires on more than one occasion to the area of land in question. Two neighbours had also purchased adjoining land to their properties.

The applicant accepted that he had fenced off the area without permission. The Council had indicated long before the erection of the fence that they would be inclined to sell the land to him and at no point had the applicant been asked to dismantle the fence.

In relation to the objections that had been received applicant commented that the garden would enhance the area and would be in-keeping with other houses in the area. The applicant commented that accusations had been made about him in relation to other parcels of land and stated that these were categorically untrue.

Councillor Kay assured the applicant that the Committee would only deal with the facts of the matter and the application before them. Any comments about former Councillors or the process would not be part of the decision making process.

The Planning and Development Solicitor advised the Committee that discussion about the possible returns to the County Council, by way of a covenant were not relevant to the application, nor were any accusations. The key deciding factor for the Committee related to whether they felt it acceptable for the land to be designated as open space.

Councillor R Ormerod commented that generally, it was not in favour of the Council keeping pockets of land outlined in the application in such austere times, particularly when there were more suitable areas of open space within the area.

Councillor Stradling commented that having considered all the information provided and listening to the representations made, that the land should cease to be classified as open space.

Resolved

That the recommendation in the report be agreed.