

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Highways Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Wednesday 12 March 2014 at 9.30 a.m.**

Present:

Councillor G Bleasdale in the Chair

Members of the Committee

Councillors C Kay (Vice-Chairman), B Armstrong, D Bell, H Bennett, O Gunn, D Hall, D Hicks, K Hopper, O Milburn, S Morrison, R Ormerod, P Stradling, R Todd, J Turnbull, M Wilkes and R Young.

Also Present:

Councillor J Blakey, B Glass and M Williams.

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Allen and I Geldard.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute Members.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 February were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4 Declarations of interest

Councillor Wilkes commented that he had previously made his feelings clear in relation to the use of bus lanes at previous forums, some of which had been reported in the media and would abstain from voting on this issue.

5 Standardisation of existing Bus Lane Traffic Regulation Orders to allow use by Buses, Taxis, Motorcycles and Cycles

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director, Regeneration and Economic Development which sought to standardise a number of existing bus lanes across the County allow use by buses, taxis, motorcycles and cycle (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Strategic Traffic Manager informed the Committee that a variety of restrictions were in place, none of which currently allowed taxis. Research with neighbouring authorities had

reflected that a combination of buses, taxis and other vehicles were allowed to access bus lanes across the North East region and were all encouraging more taxi use.

The Strategic Traffic Manager summarised the proposals for the bus lanes that were proposed to be amended to allow use by buses, taxis, motorcycles and cycles and extended to include Sunday's. The proposals would affect 12 bus lanes across the County and one bus lane in Croxdale fell outside the review as separate regulations applied. The locations of the bus lanes were detailed in Appendix 2 of the report.

The Committee heard that objections to the proposals had been received from both Arriva North East and Go North East. Their objections related solely to taxi issues and appeared to be standard objections more akin to problems encountered in large city centres as opposed to the bus lanes subject in the report. The Strategic Traffic Manager then summarised the objections detailed within the report and highlighted the following points:

- in relation to objection 1 - bus lanes in the County did not invite motorists to go in different directions;
- there was no particular reason as to why anyone would park in a bus lane and it was considered that the representations made in objection two wouldn't pose any problems as it did not currently happen in any of the localities referred to;
- in terms of objection three, it was felt extremely unlikely that taxis would pick-up fares from the locations detailed in the report;
- concerns about u-turns taking place in front of traffic after picking up a fare in a bus lane would unlikely to be an issue within Durham as the majority of the bus lanes were not within residential areas or areas likely to generate fares that would require taxis to stop;
- objection 5 could be managed and delays to buses with taxis blocking bus lanes, which could occur in Milburngate could be managed and would be unlikely to occur;
- in relation to objection 6 - the service had looked at the busiest bus lanes, however, numbers would be relatively small, for example, one every two minutes and this wouldn't have a dramatic effect on the bus lane
- Objection 7 referred to speed limits which vehicles should adhere to; and in relation to objection 8, a survey of the area had shown one taxi travelling every two minutes without causing any form of delay.

Councillors Blakey and Williams referred to the bus lanes at Croxdale and expressed concerns about speeds travelled in the area and felt that cyclists should not be encouraged to use the bus lane.

The Strategic Traffic Manager explained that the existing bus lane at Foster Terrace, detailed in the report was currently used by buses and cyclists however, the alternative would be to exclude cyclists and ultimately force cyclists to use the carriageway. The Council wished to provide good quality, wide facilities for cyclists next to main roads wherever possible, however, some cyclists would choose to use the main carriageway regardless of any facilities provided.

Councillor Williams commented that road signage in Croxdale on the roundabout continued to cause issues and motorists were not observing the roundabout correctly and felt that the proposal in the report should not go ahead.

The Strategic Traffic Manager explained that the comments made by Councillor Williams related to a bus lane in Croxdale that fell outside the review being considered by the Committee.

Councillor Stradling referred to objection one and asked why the County Council could not make a condition in the traffic orders whereby taxis could not park in bus lanes. The Strategic Traffic Manager informed the Committee that the changes to the orders would not change any existing parking restrictions. If parking became a problem then a separate restriction could be introduced in that specific area

Councillor Gunn commented that as a Councillor who served on Licensing and shared similar concerns to those of Councillor Stradling.

Councillor Wilkes accepted the points that had been raised and with the exception of one area (Milburngate) where conditions were already in place for vehicle. All of the other bus lanes were on main routes and agreed with the view of the officer that it was something that would not likely to be a problem.

Councillor Ormerod referred to objection three and commented that there appeared to be an expectation that taxis would behave in certain ways which wouldn't always be the case. Councillor Ormerod expressed concern about enforcement, particularly in relation to the bus lane on Gilesgate.

Councillor Armstrong also referred to the bus lane on Gilesgate and had often witnessed taxi drivers driving down the restricted area in an attempt to get to their destination as fast as they could. Councillor Hall expanded on this point and felt that allowing taxis to use the bus lane on Gilesgate would not only make the issues highlighted by Councillors Ormerod and Armstrong worse, but would also result in more congestion and aggressive driving and result in taxis trying to 'push in' front of other motorists who wouldn't wish to give way to let them in. Councillor Hall suggested that the bus lane at Gilesgate be excluded from the proposals on that basis.

Councillor Turnbull then expressed concern about traffic crossing the bus lane on the A690 (Stonebridge) with vehicles already having to turn left across a bus lane to access a petrol station. Vehicles also had to cross two lanes from the opposite direction to gain access to the petrol station. Councillor Turnbull highlighted that two vehicles had been 'written off' in six months at the location, one of which occurred in the bus lane and expressed concern that extra traffic utilising the bus lane would result in more accidents occurring in the location.

The Strategic Traffic Manager responded that vehicles did have to cross a vehicle lane and bus lane at present and felt that there would be no marked increase in additional vehicles with the exception of a taxi every two minutes, which was relatively modest number.

Councillor Gunn queried if the Committee were minded to agree the recommendations detailed within the report, with a proviso that the workability of the scheme could be reviewed and reported back to the Committee. Councillor Gunn also referred to enforcement aspects and wished to see some joined up thinking between licensing and

highways given that licensing should have it within their powers to provide information to taxi drivers on their driving behaviour.

The Strategic Traffic Manager confirmed that if the Committee were minded to introduce the changes they could review them at any time and that the licensing groups had originated the idea initially.

Councillor Wilkes commented that all objections had come from large bus companies with no objections from anyone else and explained that there was no reason not to introduce the proposals.

Councillor Glass indicated that whilst he was not a Committee member, he was Chairman of a taxi licensing Committee and said that problems often occurred because many local authorities in the North East operated with many different traffic regimes in place and taxi drivers travelling to Durham from different areas were simply not aware of the differing arrangements between authorities and believed that the standardisation of the existing bus lanes would be beneficial.

Councillor Stradling commented that subject to the points made by the Committee and because there had been no objections from the general public would support the proposals contained in the report, together with an undertaking that all taxi drivers would be written to and that the scheme be revisited in four months' time to enable the Committee to review the effects of the proposal.

Councillors Gunn and Hall confirmed that they were happy with the recommendation as amended.

Resolved

- (i) That the recommendations in the report be agreed; and in addition
- (ii) That the licensing authority remind taxi drivers of their responsibilities in terms of driving behaviour and the new rules;
- (iii) That a feedback report be brought back to the Committee in four months of operation of the scheme.

6 Albert Road, Consett (Off-Street Parking Places Order) 2013)

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director Regeneration and Economic Development regarding objections received to a formal consultation on a proposed traffic regulation order relating to Albert Road Car Park, Consett. The effect of the order proposed that a Monday to Saturday, 8am – 6pm, 3 hour limit, no return within 1 hour restriction be implemented within the car park. (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Committee received a presentation from the Strategic Traffic Manager which detailed the location plan of the area. Albert Road Car Park, Consett was the largest and most generally recognised, convenient off-road parking facility within the town and was well used by workers and shoppers alike on a regular basis given its location next to a pedestrianised area.

The County Council had a commitment to try and manage the parking facilities within the town to encourage economic activity and the intentions of the traffic order would allow people from the outskirts to park near the town centre and carry out their shopping.

Parking surveys had been undertaken on two separate occasions in July 2013 and the Council had held a number of meetings with Councillors and traders in the area. The results of the survey had indicated that Albert Road car park was 90% occupied by 9 a.m. on the dates monitored. 121 vehicles had been parked up for 3 hours or more. 80% of spaces were being used for long-stay parking which essentially acted to the detriment of others. 94 vehicles had entered the car park and exited without being able to find a space. It was felt that a more efficient way would be to limit parking time for three hours which would ensure a constant turnover of spaces.

Twenty objections had been received, some of which had similar themes. These had been grouped together in the report and were summarised to the Committee. Many of the objections provided reasons to have some form of control mechanism in place. It was felt that the three-hour limit was common in most town centres regionally and it was felt that three hours parking in Consett would be adequate.

One of the aims of the scheme was to prevent people who worked in the town to obtain prime parking location and added that there were many other areas in the town centre to park, even if they were not as convenient as Albert Road. The Council wished to move the emphasis and prioritise shoppers over people that worked in the town centre.

The Strategic Traffic Manager informed the Committee that it would be important to keep an eye on any displacement of traffic to neighbouring streets and if that transpired the Council would have to look at remedying the situation.

One specific objection made reference to there being too much disabled parking and loading areas throughout the town taking up valuable parking space. The Committee were informed that the current level of provision was required for people to access various facilities and the Council had worked with local shopkeepers to achieve the right balance and mix of loading facilities, with the Council always willing to change those facilities if need be.

In terms of the other representations that had been made, the Strategic Traffic Manager informed the Committee that there was no resource to subsidise park and ride in the area, therefore, this was not a valid option.

Councillor Glass, one of the local Councillors for the area commented that cross-party support had been received for the proposal presented. Traders in Consett desperately needed turnover in their businesses. In addition to this small shops were failing and the town had recently seen the demise of in-shops and there was competition from out of town shopping centres. Councillor Glass also commented that there were a number of smaller car parks that could be utilised by shop workers.

Councillor Hicks commented that the issues highlighted had been ongoing in Consett for some time and it was fair to suggest that cars were being parked there all day. A local Aldi supermarket had a limit of 1 hour and 30 minutes to prevent the same issue and felt that three hours was an ample amount of parking time.

Councillor Hall asked who would be responsible for enforcing the parking time limit. The Strategic Traffic Manager confirmed that the enforcement would be carried out by the Council's enforcement team.

Councillor Ormerod was in favour of the proposal and was pro-business and felt that people needed to think about the economic wellbeing of the town centre.

Councillor Armstrong commented that the Council were correct in introducing the proposals which would encourage more people to visit the town centre and shop.

Councillor Milburn commented that she had worked in the town centre for eight years and Albert Road car park had always been problematic. It was often the case that if people were unable to park at Albert Road, they would simply travel to other areas.

Councillor Wilkes found it incomprehensible that traders would park in places primarily meant for shoppers and that businesses should be encouraging customers rather than deterring them in the current economic climate.

Resolved

That the recommendation contained in the report be agreed.