

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Highways Committee** held in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Spennymoor on **Wednesday 13 March 2013 at 2.15 p.m.**

Present:

Councillor J Robinson in the Chair.

Members of the Committee:

Councillors B Arthur, A Bainbridge, S Hugill, E Tomlinson, J Turnbull, C Woods and J Blakey.

Also Present:

Councillors B Ord and K Thompson.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G Bleasdale, D Burn, N Foster, D Hancock, D Marshall, J Maslin, A Naylor, J Shiell, P Stradling, T Taylor, L Thomson, R Todd, A Wright and R Young.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor J Blakey substituting for Councillor A Naylor.

3 Declarations of Interest

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

4 Whitworth Park School, Spennymoor - Waiting Restrictions

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services regarding a proposed scheme of waiting restrictions around the vicinity of Whitworth Park School, Spennymoor.

The Committee had deferred making a decision on the issue at a meeting of the Highways Committee held on 17 January 2013 following representations made by residents in the area, namely those residents living at Clyde Terrace, and following concerns raised by Committee members about the suitability of the scheme. The Committee had also expressed a wish to undertake a site visit of the area, prior to the issue being reconsidered. The scheme had been devised as part of a planning condition to coincide with the merger of Spennymoor and Tudhoe Comprehensive Schools (for copy and presentation see file of Minutes).

The Strategic Highways Manager informed the Committee that the school development would increase traffic flow into Whitworth Road, via the right-turn manoeuvre at the traffic

signals and would also increase pedestrian activity on Four Lane Ends, Spennymoor. The existing traffic signals lacked the capacity to cope with any increased right-turn manoeuvre and higher traffic flows. Changes to the traffic signals would be required as part of a planning condition to improve pedestrian crossing facilities at the signals. Modification of the traffic signals would be required to manage traffic flow and reduce congestion. This would be achieved by:-

- provision of a signal controlled pedestrian crossings on all legs of the junction;
- changes to traffic signal method of operation and;
- changes to the junction layout to accommodate a two lane approach on Clyde Terrace and Grayson Road.

In addition to this, a proposed 'no waiting at any time' restriction would be introduced on Clyde Terrace. This would improve road safety and increase visibility of traffic signals for drivers and pedestrians by removing parked vehicles. It would also improve traffic flow and reduce congestion by keeping the two lane approach clear of parked vehicles.

The Strategic Highways Manager advised the Committee that the waiting restriction on Clyde Terrace was not related to parking provision at the school or issues with parent parking for drop-off/pick up provision which had both been discussed at the previous meeting.

Since the last meeting of the Committee two alternative schemes had been devised and a safety audit had been carried out on the proposed scheme together with the two alternative schemes, details of which were provided in Appendix 5 of the report and summarised by the Strategic Highways Manager. The Committee were informed that the internal safety audit report supported the original scheme for a signal controlled pedestrian crossings on all legs of the junction and the introduction of a 'no waiting at any time' restriction on Clyde Terrace. The alternative options in both cases, increased risks to drivers and pedestrians due to restricted visibility at other times and alternative option two posed an increased risk to pedestrians trying to cross the road at Clyde Terrace. Four of the five affected properties on Clyde Terrace appeared to have garage or vehicular access to off-street parking at the rear of the property.

The Strategic Highways Manager referred to an email received by officers prior to the meeting from one of the objectors and summarised the issues within, which included; a query in relation to the data provided through an Freedom of Information request about accident statistics, rat-running issues generated by traffic from the direction of West Terrace, parent drop off/pick up points, queries about the loop detection system on the approach to traffic signals, off-street parking, school travel plans, loading and unloading on yellow lines, access for emergency vehicles, photos provided to the Committee at the previous meeting, the dropped kerb on the corner of the local garage and queries in relation to the original and alternative proposals. A response was provided to each query.

Councillor Blakey suggested that a staggered stop line be included in the scheme, if manoeuvring the road was an issue and clarified the length of road as to where the waiting restrictions would be in place.

Councillor Woods queried the planning conditions referred to by the Strategic Highways Manager and highlighted the difficult decision the Committee were being asked to make.

A discussion ensued about the wider implications of the proposed scheme, such as the need for double yellow lines which would displace resident's parking and expressed concerns that such issues should have been raised at the planning stage. This would have enabled residents and local members to register their necessary objections at an earlier stage and would have made them aware of the full extent of the scheme. The Committee were appreciative of residents objections at the traffic order stage which may have borne no resemblance to the planning stage and requested that the Planning and Development Solicitor raise such issues with appropriate officers following the meeting.

Referring back to the planning conditions, Councillor Woods commented that that one condition had already been discharged, which was to close the junction to the garage. The second condition related to the pedestrian crossing phase and nothing more and queried why that sole issue could not have been looked at without the need for the additional measures.

Councillor Bainbridge commented that the vehicles displayed parked on Clyde Terrace during the presentation may not have been parked at the location during school times, given that one vehicle appeared to be a works vehicle.

The Strategic Highways Manager informed the Committee that the additional measures would be required to achieve the planning approval and to increase capacity at the junction. The intention of the photograph was to highlight visibility issues in relation to the traffic signals.

Councillor Arthur suggested that the originally proposed scheme would be the best way forward for the area, having undertaken the site visit. He felt a degree of sympathy for residents, but ultimately, public safety was of prime concern. Councillor Arthur also felt that pedestrian guardrails should be installed on West Terrace/Clyde Terrace and Whitworth Road/Whitworth Lane and moved this proposal as an addendum to the recommendation which Councillor Blakey seconded.

The Committee then heard representations from Councillor K Thompson, local member for the area who expressed concern about the two lane approach and the difficulties of HGV's and buses negotiating the turn from Whitworth Lane, which had been witnessed during the site visit. Councillor Thompson sought clarification if something could be done with the traffic signals without the need to introduce the double carriageway and also suggested that the scheme should be introduced through a phased approach. This could be reviewed appropriately at each stage and a decision could then be taken as to whether any further stages would be required.

The Strategic Highways Manager commented that a suggestion was made on the site visit in relation to the installation of a taller traffic signal head which may overcome any visibility problems for motorists and pedestrians. It was confirmed that this could be done, however, with limitations on how high the signal head could be raised. This would not resolve safety issues for pedestrians. The Strategic Highways Manager also referred to the number of cars parked outside Clyde Terrace whilst the site visit was being undertaken and commented that in effect a two lane approach was already being operated with.

The Area Traffic Engineer added that the major concerns associated with the area related to the safety of children and other pedestrians.

Councillor Maddison, a local Town Councillor, made representations as a town councillor for the area and stated that her views were her own and not those of the Town Council, who had objected. Councillor Maddison referred to possible vexatious incidents in relation to the traffic signals which could be problematic and cause safety concerns.

In response, the Committee were informed that technology was available to minimise these types of incidents, whilst not 100% perfect, it was achievable.

The Committee then heard a number of representations from local residents residing on Clyde Terrace. Mr Fletcher re-iterated his views made at the previous meeting and suggested that the scheme as presented would not physically work. Mr Fletcher commented further that:

- he had lived in the area for 32 years – the school had been there for more than 60 years with near enough a 100% occupancy rate and that boundary changes would bring in less pupils;
- delivery vehicles, heavy goods vehicles and cars accessing the local garage would potentially cause major congestion;
- there were major concerns regarding safety and privacy;
- the traffic surveys that had been carried out weren't with 'real' data and were based on models where vehicles had been inputted as units – not the actual size;
- issues around West Terrace and access to the entrance of West Terrace would be an issue when buses are parked at a nearby bus stop.

The Building Schools for the Future Project Manager confirmed to the Committee that the entrance to the new academy would open in September 2013 and improvements to the road junction would be funded from the project. Capacity at the school would grow to 1100 in 2014 and would be likely to increase up to 1350 pupils.

Mr Moore spoke on behalf of the other objectors and summarised his further views to the Committee as follows:

- highlighted issues with the design and access relating to the school (46 car parking spaces and capacity for coach parking) cited of Whitworth Terrace, splitting traffic over two entrances;
- pointed out that safety improvements had already been made in the area in 2002 with the installation of traffic signals and a puffin crossing;
- traffic calming had already been introduced in Whitworth Lane which would assist with school safety;
- residents had campaigned for traffic signals to be changed having witnessed problems experienced by larger vehicles;

- highlighted the real danger that accidents at the location would increase, purely through driver behaviour at the traffic signals;
- acknowledged the benefits of a raised traffic signal head which would provide for better visibility;
- resident and visitor safety and quality of life for residents would be severely affected;
- potential rat-running to the rear of Clyde Terrace onto West Terrace would endanger the safety of those properties who had utilised the rear of their properties as play areas for their children.

The Strategic Highways Manager confirmed that the traffic calming, signals and puffin crossing catered for previously were for existing conditions in the area and the proposed scheme would cater for future and expected conditions. It was considered that that a taller traffic signal would improve visibility and potentially combat red light running. Issues around potential rat-running could be kept under review and acted upon accordingly.

Councillor B Ord, local member for the area commented that he was positive about the school and thanked the Committee for deferring the scheme for further consideration. Councillor Ord took all aspects of road safety seriously and supported objection number seven detailed in the report and was of the opinion that in-house parking on the school grounds should have been given consideration. Councillor Ord commented that it was a simple issue that residents did not want such restrictions to be placed outside their properties and there was no argument about any of the safety features discussed at either meeting.

The Building Schools for the Future Manager informed the Committee that the issue of on-site parking at school had been debated at length during the planning stage. Every school in the County tried to avoid third party vehicles on school sites. There was no segregation at present, however, that would be provided within the new development. The provision of parking on school sites did not encourage more active ways for pupils to get to and from school.

In response to a question from Councillor Turnbull in relation to cars parking on the paved area off the pedestrian crossing from West Terrace, the Area Traffic Engineer informed the Committee that the installation of a pedestrian guardrail around the corner would prevent such instances.

Councillor Woods commented that she felt a great degree of sympathy for those members of the public who had made representations and supported the views of the two local members. Councillor Woods felt that there was no reason as to why the scheme could not be split over two phases, adding that improvements could be made to the crossing and the traffic signals initially, without the need for a two lane approach and the parking restrictions being imposed on those houses affected on Clyde Terrace and moved a proposal on that basis.

Councillor Bainbridge supported Councillor Wood's alternative proposal.

Upon a vote being taken, the amended proposal was lost.

Upon a further vote being taken it was

Resolved

That the recommendations contained in the report be agreed and in addition that the kerb be raised on the corner of Whitworth Road in line with the remainder of the kerb given that drainage was longer an issue and that pedestrian guardrails be installed at the corner of West Terrace/Clyde Terrace and Whitworth Lane/Whitworth Road.