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Our ref: JG/355

By e-mail

21 December 2018

Dear Ms Underwood

Petition 355 – Binchester Street Lights

Further to my e-mail of 30 November 2018 regarding your petition, I have received the following update from the Street Lighting Manager:

Street Lighting Energy Reduction Project

I can advise that the street lighting removals are part of the ongoing Street Lighting Energy Reduction Project which was approved by the Council's Cabinet on 12 December 2012.

Please find link to the report:

<http://democracy.durham.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=154&MId=4542&Ver=4>

This "invest to save" project involves the removal of street lights which are not required by British Standards where it is safe to do so.

The project is achieving significant savings in energy and maintenance costs that will help to meet the unprecedented reductions in central government funding. The project will also contribute to a reduction in the Council's carbon emissions.

The project originally planned 7,000 removals based on a high level desktop assessment. However, following more detailed analysis including risk assessments less than 3,000 street lights will be removed.

This demonstrates the Council's commitment to only removing street lights where it is safe to do so.

We provided an update to the Council's Cabinet on 21st October 2015 which can be found at the following link:

<http://www.durham.gov.uk/article/2510/Street-lighting-energy-reduction-project---lighting-upgrades>

Street Lighting Policy

The Street Lighting Policy which facilitates these removals, was approved by the Council's Cabinet on 20th November 2013 following extensive public consultation. Please find link to the report:

<http://democracy.durham.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=154&MId=7294&Ver=4>

The Policy was reviewed in February 2016. Please find link to the updated Policy:

Resources

Durham County Council, County Hall, Durham DH1 5UQ
Main Telephone 03000 260 000 Minicom (0191) 383 3802

<http://www.durham.gov.uk/media/3074/Street-Lighting-Policy/pdf/StreetLightingPolicyConsultationResults.pdf>

The report states "Where there is existing street lighting that is not specifically required by the Street Lighting Policy then this will be removed where it is safe to do so, based on a risk assessment of road safety and the fear of crime and following consultation with local Elected Members, Town and Parish Councils where applicable".

No street lights will be removed in residential areas, roundabouts, major junctions or where there are proven road safety and crime issues under this policy.

The policy aligns the provision of street lighting in County Durham with British Standards in line with most other Councils in the United Kingdom.

The areas where street lighting has been removed comprises areas that are of low brightness, predominately open land with sporadic or few dwellings. As defined in the Council's Street Lighting policy, on roads between villages and settlements in Environmental Zone E2 areas, lighting will only be provided where there is a known night-time road safety problem that cannot be controlled by other methods such as improvements to the carriageway delineation by reflective road studs, carriageway markings and improved signing.

Road Safety Risk Assessment

The Council has commissioned independent road safety auditors to carry out robust and detailed road safety risk assessments at each site where street lighting has been proposed for removal in accordance with the above policy.

The risk assessment includes a detailed analysis of all Personal Injury Accidents (PIA's) which have been recorded by Durham Constabulary covering a five year period. In addition, details of fatal road traffic collisions are analysed covering a ten year period.

The risk assessment process includes visiting the site and walking the route allowing for a detailed assessment of the character of the road, its environment, the condition of the existing traffic signs and road markings. The risk assessment identifies any potential hazards to highway users and considers if these can be mitigated.

The risk assessment also includes, where appropriate, the road safety auditor liaising with various teams within the Council in respect to observations relating to walking routes to schools, cycling and public rights of way.

If the risk assessment identifies any significant road safety issues that cannot be mitigated then the Council does not proceed with the removal. At these locations 5 street lights that were identified for removal have been retained following the risk assessment, demonstrating our commitment to remove street lights only where it is safe to do so.

A continuous footway exists within the site along the south western side of the highway, between Binchester and the A688. There are no crossing points so this arrangement is considered to be safe; and there are many other similar footways in the County where street lighting is not provided.

Crime

Crime can occur at any time on any part of the highway network regardless of the provision of street lighting.

The latest research commissioned by the Department of Transport confirms that there is no strong evidence to support that street lighting reduces crime although it is acknowledged that street lighting has a role to play in reducing the fear of crime. This is supported by research by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in partnership with University College London who has recently published their research on reduced street lighting and its impact on crime. The research found that overall there is no evidence of an association between reduced street lighting and increases in crime.

Consultation

I can advise that Cabinet approved the Street Lighting Policy, which facilitates the removals, on 20 November 2013.

A countywide consultation exercise was carried out, supported by a comprehensive communications plan to raise awareness of the consultation to encourage the broadest possible response to the policy review. The exercise included inviting feedback from Area Action Partnerships, Town and Parish Councils, the Disability Partnership and 3 focus groups.

The full range of communication mechanisms open to the Council were used to raise awareness of the consultation and encourage participation. These included:

- The Council's website;
- Emails to stakeholders and stakeholder groups including Town and Parish Councils;
- Awareness raising through the Area Action Partnerships;
- Media releases;
- Durham County News;
- Social media messages; and
- Information in customer access points.

Any objections received were considered during the consultation process.

As part of the removal process we consulted with local Councillors on the risk assessment to ensure that it reflected all local factors.

Service Level Agreement

Unfortunately due to unprecedented reductions in central government funding we have to make savings to balance our budgets. We appreciate that street lighting removals are not popular but we are only removing street lights that are not required by British Standards where it is safe to do so. The only way we could have retained the street lights is if a Parish Council or another third party was able to fully fund them through a service level agreement.

If third party funding can be found to fully fund the installation of new street lights and the on-going maintenance, energy, maintenance and lifecycle costs then we will be pleased to facilitate in accordance with our Street Lighting Policy.

If you would like to discuss further please contact Darren Hubbard, Street Lighting Manager, on telephone number 03000 268113 or by email at darren.hubbard@durham.gov.uk

Should you feel that your petition has not been dealt with properly, please note that you have the right to request that the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Management Board review the response to your petition. The relevant section of the Council's Petition Scheme is enclosed for your reference.

Yours sincerely

Ros Layfield

Committee, Member and Civic Services Manager

Copy for the attention of:

Councillor B Stephens

Councillor R Yorke

Councillors C Kay

Councillors C Kay & S Morrison

(Cabinet Portfolio Holder)

(Cabinet Support Member)

(Local Members)

(Chairman & Vice Chairman of Highways Committee)

Chief Executive's Office

Director of Transformation and Partnerships

Head of Legal and Democratic Services

Leader's Office

Corporate Director of

Chairman & Vice-Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny