

Binchester Residents Association

Chair G Underwood

January 25th 2018

FAO Ros Layfield
Democratic Services
Durham County Council,
County Hall
Durham

Dear Ms Layfield,

Re Petition no 355: regarding the removal of street lights numbered 799 - 800 – 802 -813 – 814 – 815 - 816 - 817 along C96 at Binchester.

On behalf of the Residents Association I write to express our dissatisfaction with the Authority's response to our petition and ask for the issue to be referred to the Council's Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board to hear our appeal.

We wish to make it clear that we support both the principle of lighting reduction (for economic and environmental reasons) and the County's policy in general, on this issue. However we feel that the way it has been implemented here has been without consultation of those most affected, and does not take into account the unique situation of C96.

We feel that had we been consulted by Street Lighting Energy Reduction Project (SLERP) we could have suggested ways in which the policy could be implemented to both save money and enable residents and other pedestrians and cyclists to use public footpaths with confidence.

In addition we feel that the response from the SLERP team did not address our particular concerns but simply reiterated the history of the Project process which we already knew.

1 Concern that we were not fully informed about the procedures we needed to follow,

With regard to utilising proper procedures I wrote to DCC in November enclosing a petition from residents here and received your acknowledgement of it on 30th of that month, in which you indicated that you would provide me with an update or a response..

On 21st December I received an email from Jackie Graham having an 'updated' attachment from the Street Lighting Manager (Street Lighting Energy Reduction Project – SLERP) which, far as I could see, was a reiteration of the history of the project since 2012 (which we had already received) and not a proper response to our concerns.

I responded to Jackie by email to this effect, and asked for it to be forwarded to yourself (followed by an brief apology as I mistook your name).

a) We were not informed of the procedure to follow and could have been judged 'out of time ' because of this oversight I do not remember (nor can I find) a clear statement informing us that we could ask the Council's Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board to review the decisions and response from SLERP.

I had been led to believe that such review was axiomatic on receipt of our petition. Fortunately, due to the diligence of our Councillor, it has been brought to my attention *5 days before the deadline* – hence my letter.

Might I respectfully suggest that the links to procedures and their significance are indicated in plain English at the earliest opportunity. This would enable the public to have access to all avenues of communication which are open to them.

2 We are dissatisfied by the 'update response' to our letter which was largely a repeat of points previously made and did not address our concerns.

a) Initially it was stated that full consultations were carried out. However we had said we were not made aware of the specific intention to remove the lights nor included in the consultation process and detailed how this was so.

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**we are not covered by either a Parish nor a Town Council;

**we were not consulted by the 'Road Safety Auditors' despite being those most directly affected

**and our elected representative was not informed.

The response to this by the SLERP team was a reiteration of the mechanisms we had already explained did not apply to ourselves.

b) We also drew attention to other vehicles of consultation which could have included residents here.

Despite quite lengthy correspondence previously between this Residents Association and DCC about several Highway related issues over many years (including the reduction on lighting on another local stretch of road (Church Street to Old Park Lodge Farm) no –one from the SLERP nor Highways has attempted to make use of this organisation (or any other) to obtain the views of residents about this more extensive proposal. **There was no explanation why this had not been utilised.**

c) Similarly there has been no explanation why alternative cost saving measures, which we could have been consulted on and wholeheartedly supported, could not have been used. eg use of timer switches and/ or dimmers. We note that these have been implemented effectively by other Councils to reduce expenditure whilst minimising the negative effect on residents of loss of necessary illumination.

NB

d) Although this is a C road, I think it is unique in that it has been designated by DCC as a main thoroughfare in the county for traffic to cross the River Wear. Over several years this Association has been in fairly frequent correspondence with Highways Dept about the narrowness of both the road and the pavement and has been informed of the status of this road as described above. This has been put forward as a reason why the density of traffic could not be addressed.

We have also brought the anxiety this causes to pedestrians to the attention of the Highways Department.

Therefore DCC departments responsible for transport will know that the road is busy with cars and HGVs travelling between the A688 and the A690 at most times of the day- All traffic passing in close proximity to pedestrians. This is unnerving enough when there is good illumination of the pavement.

e) The 'update ' refers to other 'similar roads' losing their lighting without ill effect. However it does not give references to which other C roads have been classed as main thoroughfares. We would be grateful for this information.

f) Mention is made of the 'Auditors' walking the route but makes no mention weather conditions, visibility, time of day nor season of year. We would wish to know these details to understand if fair comparisons were made.

We have mentioned our very limited bus services along the C96 and the necessity of residents without cars, the elderly, young families, those at school and in work, having to walk between the village and the A688 to pursue their daily life – accessing GPs, shops, local towns etc. Consequent on your removal of the lights, at this time of year they must walk the distance in the pitch dark in the mornings from 6am and the early evenings.

For the above reasons we believe we have been disenfranchised by the inadequacies of the consultative structure and process and ask that the decision be reviewed so that we can put forward our views which include alternative solutions. We also ask that we have access to detailed evidence of the consultations and their conclusions which have led to this decision, so that we can appraise them more fully.

Yours sincerely

Gina Underwood

Chair: Binchester Residents Association
CC Cllr Crute
Jenny Haworth
Cllr Charlie Kay
Rt Hon Helen Goodman MP

