

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Highways Committee** held in Council Chamber - County Hall, Durham on **Wednesday 20 March 2019 at 1.00 p.m.**

Present:

Councillor C Kay in the Chair

Members of the Committee

Councillors D Bell, G Bleasdale, J Chaplow, J Considine, S Dunn, K Hopper, S Hugill, K Liddell, O Milburn, S Morrison (Vice-Chairman), R Ormerod, J Rowlandson, P Sexton, J Shuttleworth, J Turnbull and M Wilson

Also Present

Councillor D Freeman

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Hicks and A Simpson.

2 Substitute Members

There were no substitute members.

3 Declarations of Interest

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

4 Proposed reinstatement of bus stop on Hallgarth Street, Durham

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services following a consultation regarding the proposed reinstatement of a bus stop at the southern end of Hallgarth Street, near Mountjoy roundabout, Durham City (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Strategic Traffic Manager informed the Committee that the County Council had been approached by Arriva who were proposing to re-route their southbound bus services on the Durham to Coxhoe corridor via Hallgarth Street. The reason behind the proposal related to the bus operator experiencing delays on the current exit route along Church Street.

Arriva felt that the re-route would save in the region of three minutes, improve punctuality and reduce the delays experienced at present. If the proposal were agreed, the exit service would travel down Hallgarth Street as opposed to Church Street. The inbound loop of the service would remain the same. The proposal would result in six bus services per hour being re-routed along Hallgarth Street.

There were currently no restrictions on bus vehicles along Church Street and Hallgarth Street. Both streets had restrictions on lorries and heavy goods vehicles. Bus companies were at liberty to use either street to but needed a bus shelter.

The Strategic Traffic Manager informed the Committee that the County Council worked regularly with all bus companies regarding the viability of their services. In this instance the outbound bus service was unreliable which was essentially due to the area being congested at Church Street upon exiting the city centre. Statistics had also shown that it was one of the most unreliable services in the North East. If the County Council didn't do something about the situation, the next port of call for bus companies would be the possibility to curtail elements of the service to local communities.

In terms of consultation the County Council had consulted on a number of matters including the placing of a bus stop sign, bus timetable, introduction of a bus stop clearway marking, the removal of three parking spaces and a raised kerb.

Six neighbouring properties, the local members and the local community association had been consulted and responses received. Responses had also been received from households slightly further away. Many of the comments were not related to the bus route or shelter and touched upon other elements such as pollution. The Strategic Traffic Manager informed the Committee that pollution and other factors were not in relation to decision. The remit of the Committee was whether to re-instate the bus shelter. Whether the bus service travelled up or down the street was a matter for the bus companies.

For completeness, all the objections had been summarised in Appendix 2 of the report. Of those responses which related to the reinstatement of the bus shelter, 10 responses related to the loss of three parking bays. The Strategic Traffic Manager advised that parking along Hallgarth Street was intermittent and there were 72 parking bays over the entire length of street.

Two objections related to the obstruction of a driveway. The Committee were informed that the driveway in question was protected by a keep clear marking and a double-yellow line, therefore there would be no impact on the drive itself in terms of an obstruction.

An objection had been received regarding the obstruction of the road. However, the Strategic Traffic Manager explained that there would be six buses per hour as

opposed to three parked vehicles and the proposal would result in less of an obstruction to vehicles.

Concerns were expressed regarding the access to a care home and the impact on the road for vehicles to pass and repass would be less.

An objection had been received regarding the cost of the scheme, although the Strategic Traffic Manager felt that the costs were fairly minimal in comparison to other Highways works and to clarify the current brick bus shelter was already owned by the Council.

In conclusion, the Strategic Traffic Manager advised that Arriva's proposal to reroute their services via Hallgarth Street would significantly improve punctuality of the service and therefore regain passenger confidence in those services and help protect bus service provision to the communities currently served on the Durham to Coxhoe corridor and beyond.

It was felt that there were no material grounds preventing the resumption of the location as a bus stop and although the rerouted bus services would add six vehicles per hour to Hallgarth Street, any marginal increase in congestion on Hallgarth Street would be offset by equivalent gains from the reduced movements on Church Street.

The Committee were recommended to resolve to endorse the proposal to reinstate the bus stop on Hallgarth Street in support of the Council's commitment to improve and promote more sustainable forms of transport.

Cllr Freeman one of the local members for the area explained that he had spoken to many residents from Hallgarth Street who had indicated that there was no demand in the street for the reintroduction of the bus stop. Arriva had referred to the levels of congestion in Church Street, the present bus route. He felt that the County Council should be trying to resolve congestions problems in Church Street, rather than adding more congestion problems in neighbouring streets. Councillor Freeman considered that it was unlikely that Arriva would see any actual benefit to reduce journey times. Hallgarth Street was severely congested at certain times of the day so it was perfectly possible that buses would become delayed in Hallgarth Street as they were in Church Street. The narrowness of street, which was very tight had seen a substantial amount of damage to cars. The area already experienced poor air quality and stationary buses would add to the problem. The loss of three parking spaces would be to the detriment of local residents who experienced problems with pay and display parking in the area. Relocating the bus stop would result in students who were currently picked up at Church Street having to cross two very busy roads to access the bus stop.

In response the Strategic Traffic Manager agreed with Councillor Freeman that there was absolutely no demand from residents. The proposal was simply a journey

time saving measure for bus services to people who lived outside the Durham City area and on the Coxhoe corridor. Councillor Freeman had suggested that both streets experienced congestion issues. However, even if both streets were free flowing the fact remained that the journey time would less. There were, at times, large number of queuing vehicles at the Church Street traffic lights given its layout. There were also many people utilising the crossing points at the location. The County Council had conducted much analysis with the bus company and both parties felt confident that the three-minute delay would be realised and that six buses per hour wouldn't cause any specific congestion.

The Committee then heard from a local resident. The resident explained that Hallgarth Street was a built-up street, where people lived for 52 weeks of the year. By comparison, Church Street had large open spaces to either side with a predominantly student population who only lived there half a year. The effect of pollution in both streets was very different due to the built up style of Hallgarth Street which almost formed a tunnel in which pollution built up. Adding diesel buses on this route would be extremely detrimental to the area. The resident referred to the photograph that had been shown to the Committee and considered that it did not reflect the true reality of Hallgarth Street, given that it was quiet, with no standing traffic and a minimal amount of parked vehicles. The street very rarely looked as depicted on the photo and felt that this was an unfair reflection of the street. It never looked like that. Standing traffic could often be witnessed in street all of the time and particularly at peak times of the day where the situation was far worse. The resident also explained that there were far more vehicles making deliveries given the increase in online shopping. The resident felt that buses would be further delayed taking the route. The Council had a certain obligation to the people of Durham City. The bus stop hadn't been used for 30 years or more, essentially for all the reasons stated, although the reasons were more acute now than they had ever been in 30 years.

Councillor J Shuttleworth informed the Committee that he knew the area well and could recall when buses used street. What had changed since that time was the increase in vehicles and the restrictive parking. Councillor Shuttleworth also felt that the picture shown to the Committee was deceiving and did not reflect the true reality of the problems experienced by local residents.

Councillor O Milburn queried how many bus stops would be lost on the route. The Strategic Traffic Manager confirmed that no stops would be lost as there were other bus services that utilised the bus stops at Church Street.

Councillor P Sexton asked if there was any evidence to suggest that the proposal would save time, other than the route being shorter. The Strategic Traffic Manager informed the Committee that the County Council had looked at route with Arriva over the entire route on every part of the corridor to the bus station. It was one of the worst performing routes, regionally. The largest, most unreliable section was the journey from Durham Bus Station to end of Church Street. It was evident that

services lost time regularly, not just at peak hours. The traffic lights at the Public House at the end of Church Street could be changed in the future but at this moment in time, there were no other gains to that would achieve the desired effect. Ticket machine data, GPS tracking data had been consistent in backing up the unreliable section of the service. Arriva had undertaken test runs and bus drivers had said they would prefer to drive down Hallgarth Street as opposed to Church Street.

Councillor S Dunn referred to the photo of Hallgarth Street and agreed with the other comments made that it didn't fairly reflect what the street looked like. Councillor Dunn travelled down the street all the time, understood the traffic flow and had also lost a wing mirror whilst stationary. Councillor Dunn also pointed out that Hallgath Street was used by various size vehicles such as prison vans, trucks and coaches. Councillor Dunn was speaking as one of the local member for Coxhoe and was speaking on behalf of residents of his area. Councillor Dunn agreed with the point made by the local resident that bus services shouldn't be allowed to ruin local communities. Kelloe was very deprived area where a lot of people didn't have cars. Kelloe had already lost out to a diluted service. Parts of West Cornforth were no longer served because of the bus company trying to save time on routes. Public transport was hugely important for people to go about their everyday lives in smaller villages and were used for shopping, doctors, hospital appointments, schools and work. The proposal presented would make a huge difference to his community. Three minutes did not sound like a lot time but would make a difference and was the solution that the bus operator and County Council had come to. Councillor Dunn felt it would be better if the County Council had a more strategic solution to put in place traffic sensors on buses and traffic lights and autoroute queues to avoid delays, technology which he felt had been available for a long period of time and moved the recommendation.

Councillor R Ormerod felt that the proposal had nothing to do with welfare of Hallgarth Street and explained that it was about convenience for Arriva and their profits, which was understandable and what any business should expect to do. However, Councillor R Ormerod felt that Durham County Council should be standing up for the people. He did not agree with the debate on the timings and felt that if the bus timetable was not realistic then it could be looked at without the need to bring forward the proposal which would be to the detriment of Hallgath Street.

Councillor J Turnbull sympathised with residents living at Hallgath Street and recalled a bus service that travelled the street many years ago. Councillor Turnbull felt that the bus operator was selective with their services, sometimes to the detriment of others and in some cases had left other customers stranded or cut-off. Councillor Turnbull felt that the route would not serve to be any quicker and suggested that the service would inevitably get held up at Milburngate roundabout and more specifically, at the SCOOT controlled Leazes Bowl roundabout.

Councillor O Milburn expressed concern about Arriva considering withdrawing services, having suffered from this previously in the community she represented where attempts were made to reorganise a service resulted in the loss of another and was concerned that Councillor Dunn's communities could be affected in the same way and seconded the recommendation. Councillor Milburn did wish to place on record that she had great sympathy with people living at Hallgarth Street and felt it was very polluting to have buses running through city centres in this way. Councillor Milburn asked officers if there was anything to be gained by getting Arriva to run more efficient engines on this route.

The Strategic Traffic Manager informed the Committee explained that the starting discussion with Arriva was regarding the cutting of services. It was only once the discussion developed into the more granular detail that the proposed solution came forward. Whilst there had been a lot of discussion in the Committee regarding pollution, the Strategic Traffic Manager explained that encouraging more people to use buses had to be the way forward to reduce pollution. The bus operator would ultimately decide what type of bus to use and as the fleet improves, with stop/start technology there would be potential benefits, however the decision made today would not have any impact on the situation.

The Strategic Traffic Manager referred to the point made by Councillor Dunn that he chose to travel the proposed route and fellow residents had made that choice because of the issues experienced at Church Street.

Councillor J Chaplow asked if the service could not exit through the Whinney Hill area of the city onto the roundabout. The Strategic Traffic Manager informed the Committee that there were services that exited through Whinney Hill, however, the road was narrower and more congested and personally could not advocate that option.

Resolved

Upon a vote being taken the Committee resolved not to endorse the proposal and would not wish to see the bus stop at Hallgarth Street reinstated.