

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Meeting of **Highways Committee** held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Tuesday 17 September 2024 at 9.30 am**

### **Present:**

**Councillor R Ormerod (Chair)**

### **Members of the Committee:**

Councillors G Hutchinson (Vice-Chair), D Boyes, O Gunn, P Heaviside, R Manchester, E Mavin, A Simpson, G Smith, A Sterling, F Tinsley, K Shaw (Substitute) (substitute for D Wood), P Jopling (Substitute) (substitute for J Howey), E Peeke (Substitute) (substitute for M Abley) and K Earley (Substitute) (substitute for M Wilson)

### **1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Higgins and C Kay.

### **2 Substitute Members**

Councillors K Earley, P Jopling, E Peeke and K Shaw were present as substitutes for Councillors M Wilson, J Howey, M Abley and D Wood respectively.

### **3 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **4 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **5 Crimdon (Off-Street Parking Place) Traffic Regulation Order 2024**

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth regarding objections received in response to the consultation on the introduction of a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) in Crimdon beach car park. (for copy see file of minutes).

The Strategic Traffic Manager provided a detailed presentation which included a site location plan showing details of the proposals, aerial photographs and details of the restriction to introduce pay and display parking in Crimdon beach car park, to encourage a turnover of vehicles and to improve access to local amenities, whilst aiding the Authority's policies on sustainable travel.

The Strategic Traffic Manager provided details of objections received in respect of the proposals and confirmed that Members were being asked in principle only, whether the TRO should be made to guide the Corporate Director in the delegated decision making exercise.

Councillor Crute addressed the Committee as Local Member and confirmed that he had met with Highways Officers to raise residents' concerns about obstructive parking in one particular location along the southern edge of the sea front in Crimdon, particularly at peak times. Recommendations to restrict obstructive parking had been made, however parking charges had never been suggested.

Councillor Crute disagreed with the reasons behind the proposed introduction of parking charges and was concerned that the changes would drive visitors away from an area which had been gradually improved in order to attract them. Crimdon was one of the only remaining visitor destinations where people could visit the coast and park for free, however instead of using this as a unique selling point to promote the area, the Council risked displacing visitors elsewhere.

Councillor Crute advised that all members of the public and local business who had contacted him agreed that the coast should be promoted as a tourist destination and its nature reserve be developed, to boost the local economy. They also considered parking charges were a retrograde step that would deter visitors and impact on local businesses.

Councillor Crute referred to the impact on visitor numbers after recent parking charges had been introduced in Seaham and advised that businesses were struggling as potential visitors bypassed the town to go elsewhere. He was concerned that parking charges at Crimdon Dene were being used as a cost-cutting measure, rather than to manage or control traffic. He referred to MTFP (14) and a £400k deficit which was proposed to be met by the introduction of parking charges along the Durham coast. The introduction of parking charges at Crimdon Dene was a short-term intervention that would have long-term impacts on visitor numbers and the local economy, in villages both nearby and across East Durham. He urged Members to reject the recommendation.

Councillor Earley considered that conflicting information had been presented. He did not accept that the introduction of parking charges could have little or no impact on footfall, which was the information presented in relation to Seaham. He was concerned that government guidance specified that users should pay for parking and the impact this could have on other areas in the county. He shared the

concerns of the Local Member, that the scheme was being introduced to address the Councils budget. Councillor Earley highlighted the potential impact on local businesses and suggested that vehicle displacement would result in obstructions elsewhere.

Councillor Boyes often visited Crimdon during peak times, however he had not witnessed parking violations of this extent and suggested they were isolated incidents. He outlined the health benefits of having the coast as a destination for exercise and its promotion by GPs in East Durham. He feared that parking charges would limit access for residents who required easy level access to coastal walks. Recent reductions to bus services already limited access and the only way to visit was to travel by car. He was concerned that the scheme would deter visitors.

Councillor Tinsley had also visited during peak times and never witnessed issues to the extent that they had been portrayed, however the photographs contained evidence of obstruction and encroachment into the habitat. He could see no justification to introduce parking charges, although he could see the logic of double yellow lines to deter parking on the grass verges.

Councillor Mavin supported the scheme. It was the only car park in the North East that did not charge for parking and since the introduction of parking charges in Seaham, all units were occupied.

Councillor Jopling considered the costs associated to be reasonable and highlighted the Councils duty to ensure the area was protected and that residents were able to use facilities in their local area.

Councillor Sterling noted the conflict between the photographs provided and statements from Members who used the area. The Strategic Traffic Manager confirmed that information provided by Heritage Coastal Officers confirmed that incidents were regular. The Traffic Engineer explained that two of the images were of the same location, one had been taken following the introduction of white lines which had not deterred parking.

Councillor Shaw agreed there was an issue to be addressed and referred to issues observed in Seaham following the introduction of parking charges. Vehicles had been displaced to other areas of the town, causing more problems. He questioned whether there was any other way to alleviate the issues without the introduction of parking charges. Having seen the impact of the parking charges in Seaham he confirmed that he would not support the proposal.

Councillor Gunn was familiar with the area and its environmental benefits and agreed that information shared in relation to footfall in Seaham was contrary to the objectives outlined in this proposal. She suggested that more consideration should have been given to the impact on both businesses and visitors, before a decision was made.

The Strategic Traffic Manager advised that Crimdon beach car park was recognised as having high parking demand and the Council had tailored its approach accordingly to promote the maximum use of spaces and discourage inappropriate parking. He explained that within the parking sector 85% occupancy was the figure whereby operational capacity was considered to have been reached within a parking area. Beyond this level of usage people had difficulty locating a vacant space and this discouraged future visits.

In response to a question from Councillor Earley regarding the alleged increased numbers in Seaham, the Strategic Traffic Manager confirmed that people were no longer parking all day on the coast and this had increased turnover and footfall. Councillor Shaw reiterated that visitors were displaced and causing disruption elsewhere.

Councillor Tinsley highlighted that though the photographs showed examples of parking violations, no data had been included in the report to reflect annual occupancy levels.

The Traffic Engineer advised that since 2023 regular reports had been received from Heritage Coastal Officers outlining the ongoing issues. The issues were more prolific in summer than winter. The Strategic Traffic Manager added that the feedback from Heritage Coastal Officers reported issues relating to parking on grassed areas, obstruction to residential access and potential risks of emergency service vehicle access. Issues raised since early 2023 were of a persistent frequency rather than one off incidents.

Councillor Boyes queried whether potential vehicle displacement had been assessed and the Strategic Traffic Manager accepted that traffic could be displaced, however the area would be monitored and addressed accordingly.

In response to a question from Councillor Sterling, the Strategic Traffic Manager confirmed that businesses had been given the opportunity to comment on the proposals however only one representation had been received from the council ran business in the immediate area who had requested a scheme as parking capacity had a direct impact on business footfall.

Councillor Shaw moved a motion to reject the proposals, seconded by Councillor Boyes. Upon a vote being taken, the motion was lost.

Councillor Jopling moved the recommendation as outlined in the report and it was seconded by Councillor Mavin.

**Resolved:** That the proposal in principle to introduce the Crimdon (Off-Street Parking Place) Traffic Regulation Order 2024 be endorsed, with the final decision being made by the Corporate Director under delegated powers.

## **6 Spennymoor (Parking & Waiting Restrictions) Traffic Regulation Amendment Order 2024**

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy & Growth regarding objections received to the consultation concerning proposed changes to the Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) in Spennymoor (Ghent Street & Wilkinson Street, Byers Green) to introduce no waiting at any time restrictions. (for copy see file of minutes).

The Strategic Traffic Manager provided a detailed presentation which included a site location plan, aerial photographs, photographs of the site at Ghent Street and Wilkinson Street, Byers Green and details of the proposal to introduce the Spennymoor (Parking and Waiting Restrictions) Traffic Regulation Amendment Order 2024.

The Strategic Traffic Manager provided details of objections received in respect of the proposals and confirmed that Members were being asked in principle only, whether the TRO should be made to guide the Corporate Director in the delegated decision making exercise.

In response to a question from Councillor Tinsley, the Traffic Engineer confirmed that there were restrictions in the bus stop that took precedent over double yellow lines and that they would be unaffected by the proposed scheme.

Councillor Manchester **moved** the recommendation as outlined in the report, which was **seconded** by Councillor Mavin.

**Resolved:** That the proposal in principle to introduce Spennymoor (Parking & Waiting Restrictions) Traffic Regulation Amendment Order 2024, be endorsed with the final decision being made by the Corporate Director under delegated powers.