

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Meeting of **Highways Committee** held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Friday 21 March 2025 at 9.30 am**

### **Present:**

**Councillor R Ormerod (Chair)**

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

Councillors G Hutchinson (Vice-Chair), O Gunn, P Heaviside, R Manchester, D Oliver, A Simpson, A Sterling and M Wilson

### **1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillors J Higgins and E Mavin.

### **2 Substitute Members**

No substitutes were in attendance.

### **3 Minutes of the Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 February 2025 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **4 Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Ormerod declared an interest as local member and City of Durham City Parish Councillor however he would not be speaking as Local Member and noted that he had not had any involvement in decisions or representations relating to item five – Durham City.

Councillor Simpson declared an interest as Local Member for Esh and Witton Gilbert ward and noted that he would speak on item six – Langley Park, it was agreed, that he could speak as a Local Member.

### **5 Durham City (Road User Charge), Durham City North East (Parking & Waiting Restrictions), Durham City (No Entry) Traffic Regulation Amendment Order 2025**

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods & Climate Change regarding objections received to the consultation concerning proposed changes to the Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) in Durham (for copy see file of minutes).

The Strategic Traffic Manager, Dave Lewin provided a detailed presentation which included site location plans, proposed signage and photographs detailing examples of traffic and parking violations. The application for changes to the TRO had been advertised in accordance with the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and Statutory Instrument 2489. The road user charge was first introduced in Durham city in October 2002 and was set at £2 with the aim of controlling the number of vehicles entering the city peninsula. The scheme was successful in cutting traffic entering the peninsula by 90% with a reduction from 2000 vehicles/day to 200. Initially traffic was controlled by a raised bollard on exit, which was replaced in August 2011 by an ANPR camera monitored system. The charge of £2 was applied to any vehicle entering the peninsula between 10am - 4pm, Monday - Saturday. These charging days and times had remained unchanged since 2002 with residents and businesses with off street parking spaces as well as Blue Badge Holders being exempt from any charge. Since the introduction of the charging regime in 2002, there had been changes in city centre use. Including an increase in outlets trading seven days a week, evening goods deliveries and survey data showed an increased number of vehicles entering the peninsula during periods when high pedestrian numbers were present. As such the charges and charging period were no longer appropriate.

The Pedestrian Zone was first introduced in Durham City with the aim of controlling vehicle volumes within the peninsula. The zone was controlled between 10am - 6pm on Silver and Elvet Bridge and 4pm- 10am in the Market Square. These times had remained unchanged since their introduction and the uncontrolled movement of vehicles had led to pedestrian and road safety concerns.

The following changes were proposed: increase of the road user charge from £2 to £5 and increased operating hours from 10am to 2am, 7 days a week. Market Place Pedestrian Zone reduction of vehicle access times from a continuous 18-hour period to 2 x 6-hour periods. Elvet Bridge Pedestrian Zone access times reduced from 1 x 16-hour period to 1 x 8-hour period.

Objections received following public consultations included 86 unique objections and 59 responses in favour. A further late objection was received on the 18 March from a parent of a child who attends Choristers school that was not reflected in the published papers. The objection was in relation to the congestion charge. Other objections related to the impact of the changes to access times and visual clutter of the signage.

Councillor S Walker, spoke as Local Member noting the support of Durham Parish Council for stricter regulations following repeated representations from residents. The tighter restrictions to access times on Elvet Bridge and the Market Place were also welcomed following over 22 years of no change to charges or access times and the addition of ANPR cameras. It was suggested that if the application was agreed, the impact of traffic flow following the increased road user charge should

be reviewed after 6 months as the increase for £2 to £5 could be too low to be seen as a deterrent.

S Harrod, Headteacher Choristers School addresses the Committee in objection of the application. She outlined the support the school shared for sustainability of a glorious area heritage site. The proposals were disproportionate and created a barrier for parents. There were walking buses in place as part of the sustainability plan however at peak times of the day the proposals would increase congestion. The congestion in the Market Place was high and further restrictions would compound this. The school offers walking bus provision that walks to the perimeter, however S Harrod felt that for young child under the age of 8 the walking route was not feasible. From September children attending the school will be from 3 years old and any proposal for those children to walk was a safeguarding risk. The access for parents and elderly grandparents collecting sick children are implemented and safeguarding needs to be considered. The increase in the daily access charge is not a proportionate increase and parent's access and decision to place children at the school could be compromised. There had been provision in place for exemption of the charge but this had been withdrawn, it was requested that consideration was given to reinstating this.

H Vaughan spoke against the application stating that she had a child at the Choristers school and worked some distance from Durham therefore drove to school to dropped off and picked up daily. She added that the increased road user charge for access to the Bailey was unreasonable as it had more than doubled and was not in line with salary increases. Parents with children at the school required access to the school site and she added that this was not an abuse of the road it was a requirement of access to collect children. She noted that the charge would target parents of the school which she felt would have been reconsidered if the application applied to parents collecting from a state run school. In her opinion the charge was a revenue making exercise rather than a traffic calming measure. Further objections highlighted that there was not an adequate infrastructure in the surrounding areas to park when collecting from school. The availability of the walking bus came with challenges as the pick-up area at the White gates on Quarryheads Lane was congested, with the police recently involved due to parking and access issues. As such an exception for parents being charged daily as road users should be reconsidered.

A Birk, spoke against the proposal, he added that the financial impact of the increased road user charge had not been considered for parents placing children at Choristers School and It was a large budget concern for parents. He noted that the walking bus route to which was meet by parents at Quarryheads Lane was currently overwhelmed during pick up times and safety of children was a concern. It was suggested that other options could be considered which charges being applied later at night with a no charge period between 4-4:30 as a measure to reduce traffic while not penalising parents collecting from school or the installation of speed cushions to slow traffic.

The Strategic Traffic Manager responded that the road was still open to users, however the increased road user charge would be applied after 10am. There would be no charge levied before 10am for school drop off, however school pick up fell within times of higher pedestrian activity therefore the £5 road user charge would be applied.

Councillor Sterling thanked officers for a comprehensive report and stated that issues with school drop off and pick up were not a matter for the Highways Committee as road safety was the priority. She asked for clarification on the wrap around provision available to parents and the walking bus arrangements for children under 8 years old. The Chair invited the Headteacher, Choristers School to respond. She outlined the wrap around care provision which operated from 7:30am and extended after school to 6pm. There were 2 walking buses leaving from White Gates in the morning and after school at 4:15. There were plans to extend these times to support the sustainability of the area. However, it needed to be noted that it was not appropriate for under 8s to walk the river path area as it was poorly maintained, slippery and dark in winter regardless of the child to staff ratio put in place.

Councillor Oliver added that access exceptions had been in place for some school permit holders and asked if this was still available. He noted that the congestion charge had remained at the same level since introduction in Durham in 2002. When compared with London where it had increased. Kieron Moralee, Traffic Management Section Manager clarified that on introduction of the congestion charge London had set a £5 user charge which increased in 2023 to £10 to the current £15. The Strategic Traffic Manager added that a list of permits had been in place that also included school nominated permit holders however following a review the list included over 10,000 vehicles that required access to the peninsular, so measures had been taken, and this number was reduced.

H Vaughan wished to note that she felt that parents had not been consulted. She noted what impact studies had been completed on the congestion at Quarryheads Lane and outside the Prince Bishops area. As the school there will be 180 students from September and there was a chaos when on the bailey there was an accident. The price bishop car part will be close for 2 years. The Strategic Traffic Manager highlighted that measures were required to address the concerns on Saddler Street where there was increased interaction with pedestrians and vehicles.

Councillor Oliver commented that the traffic congestion was heightened by the heritage nature of the area and narrow street system. While the Highways Committee empathised with parents, changes were required to better manage traffic for the safety of pedestrians and to protect the character of the city. The road user charge has not been increased in line with other authorities such as London and should be increased. He added that he was in support of the application and **moved** the recommendation.

Councillor Simpson spoke in support and **seconded** the application.

**Resolved:**

The Committee resolved to set aside the objection/s and endorse the proposal, in principle, which will then guide the Corporate Director in the exercise of delegated decision making.

**6 C62 Low Moor Road, Langley Park - Proposed Traffic Calming**

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods & Climate Change which advised Members of the proposed introduction of Traffic Calming features in the form of speed cushions between the chicane features of C62 Low Moor Road and Finings Avenue, Langley Park (for report see file of minutes).

The Strategic Traffic Manager provided a detailed presentation which included a site plan and proposed location of 5 sets of speed cushions outlined in the proposed changes to Langley Park Traffic Calming. It was proposed that speed cushions would reduce vehicle speeds but would not influence the speed of larger vehicles, however this design was standard practice at locations which serviced bus routes. The scheme had been designed with similar distances between sets of cushions to deter drivers from accelerating between cushions.

Following informal consultations, no objections had been received with 3 objections submitted from residents in the Langley Park area following formal advertising. The objections related to noise and vibration, vehicle emissions, lack of necessity and believed increased danger to cyclists/motorcyclists. A late objection from a resident suggesting changes to the location of the cushions which had not been included in the pack was shared.

A representation was read on behalf Councillor Coult, Local Member for Esh and Witton Gilbert, which outlined that resident had been in contact on multiple occasions to express concerns over the speed upon which traffic travelled on a stretch of the C62 Low Moor Road. The stretch of road had seen an increased volume of traffic over the years, that was in her opinion a result of a new housing development, as well as motorists using it as a cut through to other villages. The concerns raised had been a problem, since pre-2018, when actions were taken to install two chicanes. Whilst this had assisted with slowing down some motorists, it did not fully achieve the desired outcome. Following a 24/7 speed survey undertaken in 2021 it was confirmed that whilst the chicanes were making an impact, however 446 12% of motorists were travelling at more than 36mph. Many residents walked their children to school or needed to cross the road to get to the shops, without a dedicated pedestrian crossing. It was appreciated that not every resident deemed there to be a problem and acknowledged that some living in

proximity were concerned about the impact of sound and vibration from the cushions, but as outlined by the officer the design would take steps to keep impact to a minimum.

Councillor Simpson spoke as Local Member for Esh and Witton Gilbert. He added that concerns had been raised by residents regarding the speed of vehicle travelling along the C62 Low Moor Road, the impact of similar schemes in areas such Framlington Moor had improved road safety and slowed traffic.

Long standing Low Moor Road resident Mr Shaley spoke against the application. He stated that over 100,000 cars used the road each year which had been in a state of disrepair until recent pot holes had been repaired. He referred to the plan that showed the location of the speed cushion numbered '2' and outlined a plan to move this east by 15 meters to reduce road noise to adjacent properties. He highlighted that speed cushions would not have an impact on larger vehicles and trailers passing over speed cushions and that chicanes would act as an obstruction to slow speeding vehicles.

The Strategic Traffic Manager respond that the measures were a recognised solution to slow the speed of cars and buses would not be impacted. During consultation emergency services had been involved and they had raised no concerns.

The Lawyer (Planning and Highways), Neil Carter advised the Committee that changes to the scheme were not under discussion and urged Members to consider the current proposal outlined in the report and decide if they were in support.

Councillor Oliver commented on the proposed design of the speed cushions and the potential damage to vehicles travelling at under 30 miles per hour. The Strategic Traffic Manager clarified that the measures meet the national maximum height allowance with potential noise and vehicle damage determined by the speed of the driver. The Civil Engineering Technician, Regan Parker-Platt highlighted that as the route was used by service buses the speed cushion design had a length and height allowance to minimise discomfort to bus passengers. The spacing of cushions was consistent to prevent breaking and speeding between cushions as this reduced road noise.

Councillor Heaviside reflected that there would be a cost associated with implementation of the proposed measures and asked if the changes had been budgeted for. The Civil Engineering Technician responded that the measures would be funded through local Members budget. Any amendment to the proposed plan would impact on associated cost, for example the addition of chicanes would need additional signage with illumination to meet the required legislation.

Councillor Oliver spoke in support of the application that was within the DfT framework and **moved** the proposal.

Councillor Gunn **Seconded** the proposal.

**Resolved:**

The Committee resolved to set aside objections and endorse the proposal, in principle, which will then guide the Corporate Director in the exercise of delegated decision making.

**7 Such other business, as in the opinion of the Chairman of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration**

The Chair thanked Memembers, Vice-Chair Councillor Hutchinson and Officers for their support.