

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Highways Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Thursday 17 January 2013 at 10.00 am.**

Present:

Councillor J Robinson in the Chair.

Members of the Committee:

Councillors B Arthur, A Bainbridge, N Foster, D Hancock, S Hugill, A Naylor, J Shiell, L Thomson, R Todd, E Tomlinson, J Turnbull, C Woods, D Bowman and M Williams

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G Bleasdale, D Burn, P Stradling and T Taylor.

Also Present:

Councillor B Ord, K Thompson and M Williams.

1 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2012 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2 Declarations of Interest

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

3 Whitworth Park School, Spennymoor - Waiting Restrictions

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director, Neighbourhood Services regarding a proposed scheme of waiting restrictions around the vicinity of Whitworth Park School, Spennymoor. The scheme had been devised as part of a planning condition to coincide with the merger of Spennymoor and Tudhoe Comprehensive Schools (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Strategic Highways Manager informed the Committee that consultants commissioned by the County Council had identified the need for a two-lane approach to traffic signals from Grayson Road and Clyde Terrace to ease congestion in the area. A pedestrian phase to the existing traffic signals had also been proposed and would improve road safety for pupils, school staff and the general public.

The informal stage of consultation included a public meeting between Carillion (the constructors), highways engineers and local residents. This gave residents the chance to

discuss any areas of concern and also provided them with the opportunity to suggest amendments to the scheme, providing they were viable. Following this stage of consultation, a revised set of proposals were produced and formally consulted upon. Twelve objections remained and a petition containing 40 signatures from residents of Clyde Terrace and Whitworth Terrace had been received by the end of the formal consultation period. The objections that remained centred around the proposed removal of parking from residential properties, the two-lane approach to traffic signals and the lack of any parent drop off/pick up point at the school development were then summarised for the Committee.

The Strategic Highways Manager also referred to an email received by officers prior to the meeting from one of the objectors and summarised the issues referred to in the email which included accident statistics, the formal consultation period, amendments made to the scheme since the informal stage of consultation, potential for rat-racing, copies of information from the emergency services and an explanation of traffic data.

In response to objections around parking provision, the Strategic Highways Manager informed the Committee that, the County Council, as the Highways Authority, was obliged to seek improvement to junctions and capacity where required. There was not always the opportunity to accommodate on-street parking and there was no right for members of the public to park on the Highway. In response to other objections the Committee were provided with an explanation of the different types of traffic schemes that had been modelled, which took into account committed development, traffic flows associated with peak and off-peak periods and future growth associated with the school. The additional lanes proposed were required to assist with traffic congestion. The scheme also incorporated a pedestrian phase where all traffic could be stopped by the school crossing patrol.

Councillor Woods commented that a large number of schools across County Durham were encouraged to use different alternatives to limit pick-up and drop-off points at schools and queried whether this option had been explored and whether the School Travel Team of the County Council had been consulted with at any point during the process.

Councillor Turnbull felt that the road was far busier than had been suggested and for longer periods during the day. He had witnessed larger vehicles experience particular difficulties manoeuvring the junction from Whitworth Lane into the Town Centre. Councillor Turnbull made reference to there being 'no changes to the kerb line' during the presentation and considered this to be incorrect as he had noted that a dropped kerb had been installed next to the garage situated on the junction. The Senior Professional Assistant confirmed that Councillor Turnbull was correct and kerbing work had been carried out by way of a redundant access on the garage premises, following discussions with the owner of the garage. This was to assist with drainage in the area.

Councillor Foster commented that many schools in County Durham experienced similar sorts of issues, particularly around parent drop off/pick up points. The merging of the schools had been part of the Building Schools for the Future project, for which funding had been subsequently withdrawn by the coalition government. Ultimately, this had resulted in some opportunities being lost, however, the safety of pupils was of paramount importance and both the school and the Council would use every opportunity to encourage initiatives to mitigate transport problems in the area.

In response to a question from Councillor Bainbridge regarding the possibility of residents being able to park outside their properties on Clyde Terrace outside of peak times the Strategic Highways Manager informed the Committee that the provision of a two-lane approach to deal with the volume of traffic meant that the traffic signal would be moved into the main footway. This had to be visible to all drivers and the only way of achieving this was to remove some parking and introduce the waiting restriction.

Councillor Bowman queried the availability of alternative parking for residents affected should the scheme go ahead. The Committee were informed that there was provision in the restrictions for residents to load and unload goods and passengers outside their properties and parking was available on the adopted highway to the rear of the properties.

Councillor Ben Ord, one of the local members for the area informed the Committee that Spennymoor Town Council had objected to the proposals on road safety grounds which had been passed to relevant officers. Councillor Ord felt that capacity for pick-up and drop off parking at the school should have been made researched at an earlier stage. Councillor Ord also commented on difficulties appreciating the impact of the scheme at the informal stage, particularly at the public meeting, where there had been no plans available.

Councillor K Thompson commented that the Highways officers had produced some excellent work and initially thought the waiting restrictions may have improved the area. However, having given the issue further consideration and after taking into account the representations made to him personally he felt that traffic management in the area should be addressed on completion of the construction phase and once everything was operational. Councillor Thompson felt that it was impossible to predict what effect the merger of the schools would have on traffic, despite the different traffic modelling that had been undertaken. Furthermore, he had contacted the School Travel Plan team who had confirmed that they had not been approached for advice in relation to the school which was particularly disappointing given that the Council was supposedly a lead authority in this area with £4.8m worth of funding being provided to a local sustainable transport fund.

In summary, both local members suggested that the scheme had not been properly investigated during the initial phase and that the scheme should be reconsidered.

The Committee then heard from a number of representations from local residents. Mr Fletcher who lived on Clyde Terrace acknowledged that safety was of major importance but suggested that the scheme outlined would not physically work for the following reasons:

- delivery vehicles, heavy goods vehicles and cars using the garage opposite Clyde Terrace would create major congestion and was an issue that had been overlooked;
- there were 3 bus-stops on the junction with 12 buses per hour in three different directions and buses stopping on West Terrace would have to pull out from behind parked cars;
- traffic signals could be set to ensure free-flow of traffic
- if scheme went ahead cars would be forced to use the rear lane of Clyde Terrace which has no footpath and is a maximum of 4 metres wide which would potentially obstruct emergency vehicles, endangering both life and property;
- removal of the parking space would severely affect the quality of life for residents

- traffic would be inches from the properties

The spokesperson for the remainder of the objectors highlighted that the scheme affected the whole terrace and surrounding area (including St. Pauls Gardens) and summarised their main objections to the Committee, which included:

- there was already competition for parking which had already resulted into neighbour disputes which would only be exacerbated;
- vehicle crime and damage was already a problem;
- the local garage was used 24 hours a day;
- noise and pollution, the health and wellbeing of people had not been taken into account;
- questionable traffic flow timings and peak/off-peak times;
- property prices would plummet
- there was no real traffic data available, no student data and no detail of any form of travel plan;
- a secondary set of lights on the road would resolve any issue of the lights being restricted;
- the Town Council and local councillors had all objected;
- no data had been made available about free school buses
- no regard for safety of the children and those residents living in the affected properties on Clyde Terrace;
- the allowance for parking and unloading of vehicles was impractical;
- vehicles would have great difficulty in manoeuvring the back street;
- queried the responses provided by the emergency services.

Photographs taken by residents of Clyde Terrace were also shown to the Committee which aimed to support their concerns and provided Members with an idea of the layout of the area and traffic conditions.

Councillor Naylor expressed sympathy for the residents, commenting that similar problems were encountered across the County. It appeared that there was a general feeling that the scheme hadn't been particularly well thought out and expressed concern about the lack of 'real' data and suggested that the scheme should be revisited.

Councillor Woods supported those representations made by the local members and with the suggestion that the Council should wait until the school was fully operational and that traffic be reviewed at that stage. The issue of consultation was a clear cause for concern, particularly when it appeared that no work had been undertaken with the Headteacher or the School Travel Plan team. It was felt that assistance should have been sought in this area.

Councillor Arthur commented that he would be inclined to defer the proposal as presented given the strength of the representations made. He felt that the issue raised by Councillor Thompson about a potential parking/drop-off area had not been investigated properly and felt that a site visit would have been beneficial.

Councillor Hugill suggested that a site visit to look at the physical layout of the area would be beneficial given that not all members of the Committee were familiar with the area and on hearing the representations made at the meeting. He also commented that many other local authorities were looking towards reducing speed limits around schools to 20mph and it appeared that this had not been considered as part of this scheme where perhaps it should have been.

Councillor Bowman supported Councillor Naylor's suggestion and with those Members of the Committee who called for a site visit. She felt that the scheme needed to be revisited in light of the representations made at the meeting.

The Planning and Development Solicitor advised and reminded the Committee that the scheme had come about as part of a planning consideration and that the restrictions would be required for the new element of the school to open.

Councillor Woods clarified that the Committee were suggesting deferment of the scheme to enable them to conduct a site visit and present a revised set of proposals given that debate by the Committee was that the scheme as it stood at present had not been given proper consideration and it was not considered appropriate for the Committee to meet again with the same plans.

The Strategic Highways Manager added that the site visit and discussions that follow would be in effect a short adjournment and full consideration of the timescales involved which would enable the Council to discharge the planning condition and present further options would be critical and further arrangements would be made as soon as possible.

Resolved:

That the Committee defer the proposed scheme to enable a site visit to take place and that a revised scheme be submitted to the Highways Committee for consideration.