

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL
CASTLE MORPETH LOCAL AREA COUNCIL

At the meeting of the **Castle Morpeth Local Area Council** held at Meeting Space - Block 1, Floor 2 - County Hall on Monday, 9 May 2022 at 4.00 pm.

PRESENT

J Beynon (Chair) (in the Chair)

MEMBERS

R Dodd
J Foster
M Murphy
D Towns

L Dunn
V Jones
G Sanderson
R Wearmouth

OFFICERS

M King
L Little
P Lowes
R McCartney
N Snowdon

Highways Delivery Area Manager
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Neighbourhood Services Area Manager
Highways Infrastructure Manager
Principal Programme Officer (Highways Improvement)

Around 3 members of the press and public were present.

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bawn, Darwin and Dickinson.

2 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings of the Castle Morpeth Local Area Council held on Monday 14 February 2022 and 14 March 2022, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and be signed by the Chair.

3 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No questions had been submitted.

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PETITIONS

(a) Receive New Petitions

Mandy Trotter (lead petitioner) was in attendance and handed in a written petition and advised of an e-petition which had also just closed which requested a pavement/cycleway connecting Red Row Drive to Barrington Road. She provided an introduction to the petitions which included the following information:

- Red Row Drive was the connecting road from Barrington Industrial Estate, through a residential area, avoiding the town centre and providing access to the A1147 and Spine Road. It was a very busy, short stretch of road with blind bends with industrial traffic to horses using the road.
- There was only a limited stretch of pavement and for approximately 400m there was no pavement and no alternative but to walk on the road against oncoming traffic as using the grass verge was unacceptable and impossible for those with pushchairs, mobility issues and wheelchair users.
- It linked the community to Bedlington Station, Bedlington and Choppington giving access to local shops and transport etc and to the east linked with Bomarsund, Stakeford and the A1147 giving access to TT Electronics Welwyn Components, Rutherford Cancer Centre and Earth Balance.
- Barrington Industrial Estate was part of the community and it was understood that access was needed to the Spine Road along Red Row Drive. Remondis were supporting the request and had pledged a contribution of £1500 towards the cost of the scheme, should it go ahead.
- A pavement/cycleway would provide a safer route to the new rail link rather than using the Welwyn Bridge, with the increased traffic accessing the new car parks.
- The e-petition had received 286 signatures and the paper petition had another 34 signatures and showed the strength of feeling from local residents.
- Pedestrians were the most vulnerable of road users and were owed a duty of care. There should always be sufficient space for a wheelchair or twin set pushchair to pass comfortably without being forced to step into the road.
- Northumberland's Local Transport Plan 2011-2026 promoted safer and healthier travel, including walking and cycling.
- The petition was not a complaint regarding the level of traffic using Red Row Drive, but was a request from the community for a pavement/cycleway to rid the anxiety and make it safe and fit for purpose.

Councillor Foster, local Ward Member thanked the lead petition for bringing this forward stating that she fully supported the request. This had been requested for a number of years, however due to costs involved had not been taken forward. There was a risk to pedestrians having to walk on the road with the high number of large vehicles using the road and the speed of vehicles. Anyone with mobility problems could not use the safe school route over the bridge as they needed to

use a flat route. The road also provided access to the Industrial Estate and to a café. It would be a natural route for users of the new railway station and demand would increase with its opening. She advised that she would be willing to contribute funding to a scheme and was sure that the Councillors from neighbouring wards would also wish to do so as this route was well used by their residents.

The Chair thanked the lead petitioner for her attendance and asked that a report be prepared for a future meeting.

(b) Petitions Previously Received – Speed Reduction Northern Bypass – St Georges roundabout – Northgate roundabout, Morpeth.

A report on the petition had been circulated with the agenda. Vicky Oakley, lead petitioner addressed the Committee speaking on the petition. The following information was noted:-

- Councillor Towns had been contacted on this matter in the spring of last year and had advised that he would seek a speed reduction but it would be unlikely that a crossing would be accepted.
- Following a freedom of information request, it became apparent that there had not been clarity on exactly what had been requested.
- The request was supported by residents, Hebron Parish Council and Northgate hospital.
- The bypass was a busy 60mph road. With the Council's emphasis being on more walking and cycling it is imperative that crossings were safe. Numerous parents had come forward with their concerns about the crossing, many thought it was a matter of time before something fatal happened and felt let down that their previous attempts to get something sorted had not been listened to.
- There were two large new estates, The Meadows and St Andrews Gardens, a hospital and the wider population of Fairmoor who used the crossing to walk into Morpeth on a daily basis or walk along the path on the bypass road. These estates hosted families with children of school age and the hospital had patients with complex needs and the capacity of which was to significantly increase.
- In addition to the extra patients, there would also be significant extra traffic using the bypass road to go to and from work. There were also plans to build hundreds of houses just off the St Georges roundabout. This roundabout would be used to service this new housing estate and traffic would be filtering onto the bypass road and onto the A1.
- Children who walked to school on their own had to make a judgement call on the speed of the traffic travelling the bypass road and judge when they felt it was safe to cross with the significant damage that could be inflicted to a child should they be hit at speed highlighted.
- The petition was started as parents felt their voices were not being heard and in an attempt to protect their children from the dangers of the road. Parents wanted the speed reduced between St Georges roundabout and the Northgate roundabout in addition to a safer crossing on the road.
- Whilst Councillor Town had advised that it would be unlikely a zebra crossing would most likely not be appropriate, the zebra crossing close

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to the roundabout on the B1337 from Morpeth to County Hall was referenced. There would also be an argument for a speed reduction based on noise reduction for the residents of The Meadows, with a similar speed reduction in force on the road coming into Morpeth beside Southfields.

- If families were to be encouraged to allow children to walk to school then the route needed to be safe and currently it was not.
- Comments submitted from both parents and staff at the hospital were read out and had been included on the original petition letter.
- It was hoped that all Councillors could work together to ensure that children were safe and parents confident to allow their children to walk to and from school and to achieve the wider goals of the Council in increasing levels of walking and cycling.

N Snowden advised that a Safe Routes to School Assessment was to be carried out to identify any improvements and signage that was required and to also consider if any speed reduction was necessary. It was hoped that the assessment would be completed and feedback provided prior to the end of the school term. There was currently a speed survey on the route.

Councillor Towns, Ward Councillor, thanked both the lead petitioner and Officers advising that this had been a design issue with the bypass with the land previously not allocated for housing. He supported the petition to get some action. He had met with Mr McCartney on site and advised that whilst traffic slowed down when approaching the large roundabout it accelerated whilst coming off the roundabout and felt that the danger was with traffic leaving the roundabout. He was not 100% convinced that installing a pedestrian crossing would make it safer. He believed that the pedestrian crossing referenced in Morpeth had only been installed in that location as that was where people would continue to cross even if a pedestrian crossing was installed elsewhere. He welcomed the petition, but did not know the answer but hoped that their concerns would be addressed as much as they could be.

Members stated that they would be cautious in imposing speed restrictions on longer stretches of road as, unless they were seen as logical to drivers, they were often ignored and therefore should only start when speed became a danger to pedestrians. It was considered that housing developers should be held to account and to pay for this kind of local infrastructure and make safe travel plans for children to walk and cycle. The vulnerable nature of patients from the hospital also crossing the road was highlighted and it was suggested that additional signage and proposals to meet their needs should be taken into consideration. The possible use of a crossing patrol officer should also be considered, however officers highlighted the difficulties experienced in recruiting to these roles across the County.

Members agreed that a report on the findings should be considered by this Committee with any identified works possibly being included in the Local Transport Plan.

(c) Updates on Petitions previously received – no updates were provided.

5 LOCAL SERVICES ISSUES

P Lowes, Neighbourhood Services Area Manager, provided an update as follows:-

Waste Services – residual and recycling were performing well other than strain due a shortage of HGV drivers, but services were continuing to be provided and recruitment for drivers ongoing. There was a high demand for bulky waste removal and there had been an increase of 400 new customers for garden waste removal, taking the total up to 6,800 paying customers this year.

Grass Cutting – seasonal workers had been recruited with cutting commencing at the end of March/beginning of April and it was now the third cut of the season. There had been some delay due to inclement weather and bank holidays but the team had recovered well.

Weed spraying – obstacle spraying had finished and hard surface spraying had commenced. Verge cutting would be commencing shortly with the schedule as previous and assistance by farmers provided. Visibility splays would be monitored and Members should report any issues.

Information in response to questions from Members was noted as follows:-

- Plans had been sent to Councillor Dodd regarding the proposals for the flashing 20mph signs to be provided from West Woodburn and new countdown markers and existing refreshed in Belsay. Mr Snowdown was happy to attend the Parish Council meetings with Councillor Dodd regarding proposals and any additional work which could be undertaken.
- Riverside Close in Ponteland, intend notices were being issued and after three weeks if no objections were received then the orders could be made.
- Legal clarification would be sought on the use of non-Northumberland parking discs in Council owned car parks allowing free parking for a prescribed time.
- There were no weed spraying trials this year and supplies for this year had been purchased at a good price last year. A report was currently being written regarding the trials and would be circulated in due course.
- The Highways Inspector would be asked to visit the vacant Co-operative building in Lynemouth to ascertain responsibility for weed management and a notice would be served to the owners should it be found to be their responsibility.
- It was not possible to provide a timescale regarding the Safer school initiative in Ellington, it was generally approximately three months, however the scheme was with the Design Team who unfortunately were experiencing some illness in the team.
- In respect of the schemes which Councillor Jones highlighted which were not showing up on her Members Schemes, Mr Snowdon advised that the Halton Shields was listed as an LTP Scheme and he would ascertain progress on the others.
- In respect of works with utility companies, the main legislation used in respect of works in the highway was the New Roads and Streetworks Act and specifically within Section 59 of this the Local authority was obligated to coordinate all works within the highway and Section 60 the utilities companies are obligated to work with Local Authorities to

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minimise disruption in the highway. There was a North East Highways and Utilities Committee (HUC) where all Local Authorities and utility companies came together regularly to discuss all the planned road openings. There was also a local HUC meeting which was where the finer details of the works would be discussed along with any impacts. The works in Morpeth would have gone through this process and would have been planned in detail in advance. The works had already been delayed for some time as it was known how big an impact it would have on the town centre, however it was a matter of health and safety and the Council had to be guided by the Gas Network. It would have been easier for the utility company to have a full closure of the road, however this would not have assisted the operation of the town centre and therefore a one-way system, which had previously been used, was agreed. Once work had commenced the utility company had realised that additional work would be required which they advised necessitated closing the whole road to which the Council had not agreed. The identified options were to close the whole road; pull off site and reschedule the closure for another time; pull off site to come up with a different solution. Through extensive discussions at local HUC meetings a solution was eventually agreed that they would continue with the one-way system for another 2.5 weeks in order to carry out the remaining works.

- The vast majority of scheduled roadworks/road closures should be notified by way of local communications and letter drops to affected residents/properties. All information on proposed roadworks could be found on One Network which could be accessed by all Councillors and identified all roadworks to be undertaken within the County. A filter could be used to identify roadworks in a particular Council Ward and information on how to do this would be circulated to all Members of Council so that they could then cascade information to their residents. More use of social media to publicise works would also help.

M King, Highways Delivery Area Manager, provided an update to Members which included the following information:-

- Restrictions surrounding Covid were starting to ease however some rules were continuing to be followed to protect front line operatives.
- Reactive maintenance - teams were continuing Category 1 works while continuing with the catch up from recent storms. Routine Inspections were ongoing, however there was a slight backlog. Reactive third party requests continued to rise higher than any other area. The backlog of works continued to be reduced and the introduction of a hotbox for the Castle Morpeth area should see a substantial reduction in the back log of approx. 700.
- Gully Maintenance - new vehicles had arrived in April and training was required for operatives before vehicle roll out.
- Drainage Works – a large amount of drainage works had been identified and a program of works issued and were ongoing. Works were still being identified from storm damage with several areas requiring clearing of debris which was a main cause of blockages. Works currently being programmed for post April start date with all works communicated prior to start date.

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- Minor Patching Program – a list of completed works was provided and were included on the report which would be circulated to Members after the meeting. Details were also provided on footpath works and the future programme of patching works and the Local Transport Plan.
- Resources – 3 operatives had been appointed at various levels and 4 further posts were to be advertised this month.

In response to questions from Members the following information was noted:-

- The lead in time for the replacement of street furniture was 6 weeks, but works should not be taking months to complete. Highways Inspectors would be requested to be vigilant and report any delays in replacing furniture. Street lighting levels at the chicanes on the C403 would be investigated to see if this was having an impact on the number of accidents at that location, as it had also been suggested that glare from the sun was also causing issues.
- Information would be sought from the Design Team on the current position regarding the chicane Barrett had installed in Pegswood from the approach to Whorrel Bank.
- There was a standard process for filling potholes however unless the holes were cut and had straight edges there was nothing to prevent traffic forcing the repair out. Patching and repairs to strategic routes were prioritised and then rolled down the road hierarchy, with £2.3m identified for repairs on U and C class roads this year.
- Resurfacing and maintenance works were planned around Trittlington First School and the road safety works would be done at the same time.

6 MEMBERS LOCAL IMPROVEMENT SCHEME

A progress report dated 1 March 2022 had been circulated with the agenda. Members were advised that a new version had been received after the agenda had been published and was now available on the Council's website. Clarification would be sought on the current position in relation to the installation of bollards to prevent the use of land by motorcycles in the Lynemouth area as requested by Councillor Dunn.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

7 LOCAL AREA COUNCIL WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair advised that this was for information and should Members wish to ask for any items to be added to the agenda, then they contact either himself or Democratic Services.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled for Monday 13 June 2022 and would be planning only.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....

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