

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

PETITIONS COMMITTEE

At the meeting of the **Petitions Committee** held at Conference Room 1 - County Hall on Thursday, 27 April 2023 at 2.00 pm.

PRESENT

R Dodd (Chair) (in the Chair)

MEMBERS

C Ball

T Cessford

J Reid

L Bowman

D Ferguson

M Swinburn

OTHER COUNCILLORS

V Jones

G Stewart

J Riddle

OFFICERS

G Gavin

D Groves

E Sinnamon

N Snowdon

N Turnbull

Head of Neighbourhood Services

Commercial and Contracts Manager

Head of Planning

Principal Programme Officer (Highways Improvement)

Democratic Services Officer

1 member of the press and 2 members of the public were present.

9 MEMBERSHIP

To note the following changes to the membership:

Councillor Ferguson had replaced Councillor Flux as a member of the Committee.

10 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from R Murfin and P Jones and Councillors Scott and Taylor.

11 MINUTES

Minute No 7.1

Petition Against On-Going Planning Issues of Pedestrian Safety and Access to Local Services at Arcot Manor/The Fairways, Cramlington

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Clarification was sought regarding reference to Cramlington Town Council in the third bullet point on page three of the minutes. This referred to the flashing speed signs installed by the Town Council which were supposed to be relocated every 3 or 6 months.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Petitions Committee held on Wednesday, 26 January 2023, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

12a **CAMPAIGN TO REVERSE THE DECISION TO REDUCE OPENING HOURS AT PRUDHOE HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECOVERY CENTRE**

The Petitions Committee acknowledged receipt of a petition received regarding proposals to reduce days at Prudhoe Household Waste Recycling Centre and to agree the Council's response. (A copy of the papers were enclosed with the signed minutes).

Paddy O'Kelly, the lead petitioner, addressed the Committee and made the following comments:

- He had been recently elected to Prudhoe Town Council as the Councillor for West Wylam where the Recycling Centre was situated.
- When a similar decision had been made to reduce opening hours at other sites in 2016, there had been extensive consultation with local community groups and parish councils. He queried why there had been no such consultation this time with Prudhoe groups.
- Many residents had complained to him about the proposed closure when he had been campaigning. A petition had been a legitimate way for people to express their opposition. It had received over 1100 signatures.
- The Northeast has the second highest incidence of fly-tipping in England – 26.5 incidents per 1,000 people in 2021/22 (gov.uk). Whilst people shouldn't fly tip, they should be given less reasons to fly tip, not more. In 2020, Councillor Sanderson had been quoted as saying "almost all the waste fly tipped in our county could legitimately be taken to one of our 12 Household Waste Recovery Centres and disposed of free of charge." The proposed closure made that less likely when more should be done.
- The County Council had claimed that partial closures of other sites in 2016 had not increased fly tipping. However, there had been 2,000 fly tips in 2015/16 with 5,000 fly tips by 2019/20.
- The proposed closure could potentially lead to a reduction in recycling when we needed to recycle more, not less. The county has a poor record of recycling, ranking one of the worst in England according to a survey in 2020.
- Figures from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs showed that recycling in Northumberland had fallen from 36% to 32% between 2019/20 to 2021/22. Comments suggested that this may partially be due to the disruption of services during the pandemic. The latter validated their point that the disruption of services led to falls in recycling.
- Lower traffic was cited between Tuesday to Thursday. Whilst Tuesday and Wednesday were quieter days, the difference was marginal and Thursday was busier than average. 40% of traffic to the centre currently occurred between Tuesday and Thursday.

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- If the closure went ahead, there would inevitably be 40% more traffic on weekends, more disturbance and pollution for residents from queueing traffic, particularly on Broomhouse Road.
- A sign about the closure indicated the next nearest facilities were in Hexham, a 26 mile return journey, or Blyth (44 miles) or Ashington (52 miles). Reference was made to the Council's climate pledge "The council is committed to tackling climate change. Transport is the single biggest contributor of carbon emissions in Northumberland. We need to change the way we travel by taking shorter journeys." Proposing unnecessary trips was irresponsible and sending the wrong message on the environment.
- Savings of £30,000 per annum were estimated from the closure but did not take into account the potential extra fly-tipping and clearance. £118,000 was spent in 2015/16 on 2,000 fly tips. This was now over 5,000 and would continue to climb if the closure went ahead. The estimated saving was overstated with the real saving being considerably less.
- Prudhoe Town Council had recently discussed the matter and had written to the County Council to voice its opposition to the closure. There was anger that the decision had been taken remotely with no consultation. If the County Council responded positively to the petition, it would show that it listened and cared about the opinions of local people changing its plans for a better outcome.

Clarification was sought regarding the following:

- It was unknown at the present time how many users would travel further to another site between Tuesday to Thursday compared to waiting until the site at Prudhoe reopened on a Friday.
- There was concern that the sign encouraged residents to travel, particularly if they were unaware of the changes to opening hours and had packed their vehicles.
- The potential for fly-tipping was the biggest issue. This had been recognised in the email sent to Councillors which said that the Council would work with the operators of the site to clear up any additional fly-tipping as quickly as possible.
- It was queried whether the changes had been well advertised initially if not for the petition. More information was available now but there had been no consultation.
- The best information available was the number of skip movements per day. 40% of the skips were moved between Tuesday-Thursday.
- Approximately 700 of the 1,100 petition signatures were from residents in Northumberland.

Councillor John Riddle, Portfolio Holder for Local Services explained that when similar changes had been implemented by the previous administration in 2016, some initial problems with fly tipping had occurred in the following few weeks before it had settled down when users got used to the new open days. Full closure of sites had been an option which could have been considered. The reduced hours proposed at the two sites had been specified within the budget papers. Discussions had been held at meetings of the Local Areas Councils and scrutiny. The incidents of fly tipping were very low in the Tynedale area and had been reducing in Northumberland with hot spots located in areas of Blyth and Ashington. The changes had been advertised as well as possible at the sites, on

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social media and via the Council's website. He believed that residents would get used to the changes very quickly.

Northumberland County Council operated straightforward opening hours whilst some neighbouring authorities had implemented more complicated systems with vehicle registrations dictating what days Household Waste Recovery Centres facilities could be visited. It was not anticipated that there would be problems from queuing traffic as the site in Prudhoe had quite a long access road with operatives on site to assist.

Greg Gavin, Head of Neighbourhood Services stated that the Council was committed to providing high quality waste services which provided good value for money as demonstrated at the 12 Household Waste Recovery Centres (HWRC) and the network of other recycling points. The facilities at Prudhoe were very good. He highlighted the following to address issues raised by the lead petitioner:

- The decision to reduce the opening hours at two sites had been made to provide value for money and ensure that good quality services continue to be delivered at all sites. The high level of customer satisfaction underpinned the view that the sites were well used and respected and the quality of services appreciated by residents.
- The statement that the reduction in opening hours had contributed to the increase in fly tipping after 2016, was not supported by data. Fly tipping had increased in Ashington and Blyth which had not been impacted by reduced hours at local HWRCs which continued to be open 7 days per week. At some sites where reduced hours had been implemented, there had been no incidents of fly tipping whilst some had experienced a small increase for a few weeks, until residents became familiar with the new arrangements. All of the HWRCs occasionally experienced incidents of fly-tipping outside of opening hours, even when premises were open the next day.
- Opening hours at HWRCs did not influence recycling performance which was driven by the volume of waste deposited and what could be recycled from that material. The key determinant being what processing facilities were available for the materials. Reference was made to the closure of processing plants which could strip metal and other materials from mattresses, which could unfortunately no longer be recycled.
- All sites occasionally experienced queueing traffic, such as following a sunny bank holiday weekend when lots of residents brought gardening or other materials. Queues were not common, and it was not anticipated that the changes in opening hours would increase the chances of this. The configuration within the site at Prudhoe enabled vehicles to queue if necessary. Site operatives were also used to high throughput of vehicles during busy periods.
- The proposals had not led to any compulsory redundancies by Suez, the waste contractor. Employees had been offered alternative shifts or shifts at other sites in Northumberland. One member of staff had taken voluntary redundancy.

The following information was provided in response to questions from members:

- The savings figure of £30,00 had been calculated by the contractor who operated the HWRC through reduced operating hours for the infrastructure

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required to service the sites which included haulage costs with reduced hours for vehicles and staff on site.

- Monitoring arrangements would be put in place to assess whether there was an increase in fly tipping with mitigation to ensure that the local areas weren't blighted.
- The HWRCs were purely used by residents and could not be used by commercial operators for the disposal of business waste.
- The closure of HWRCs at short notice due to adverse weather conditions, such as high winds, had not led to a noticeable increase in fly tipping. Unplanned closures generally lasted less than a day.
- As there had been extensive consultation with similar proposals in the past, it had not been considered necessary this time. However, there had been several opportunities for the matter to be raised as detailed earlier in the meeting.
- Councillors were elected to represent residents and attended meetings on their behalf. Many also had dual roles as elected members of the County Council and local Town or Parish Council.
- Some members felt strongly that there should have been consultation exercise and had abstained or voted against the budget proposals. They also queried why facilities be closed to the public if operatives were working at the site, particularly given the distances that would need to be travelled to an open facility in the west of the county and the environmental impact and potential for increase in fly tipping.
- The Chair thanked the lead petitioner for attending the meeting. Whilst he sympathised, residents had changed their habits and had adjusted to new opening hours following the changes in 2016.

RESOLVED that:

- a) The contents of the report be noted.
- b) The reasons for the decision to reduce the opening hours at Prudhoe Household Waste Recovery Centre (HWRC), be supported.
- c) The assurances that the recycling performance of the facility and any adverse impacts on the local environment, namely increased fly tipping in the Prudhoe area, will be closely monitored and appropriate mitigating action taken, if necessary, be acknowledged.

12b **UPDATE REPORT ON PETITION REGARDING COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN TO AMEND THE USE OF MILITARY ROAD B6318 JUNCTION OF A68 TO HEDDON ON THE WALL**

The Petitions Committee received an update on developments since the original petition was discussed at the meeting on 26 January 2022. (A copy of the report is enclosed with the signed minutes).

Andrew Clayton, the lead petitioner explained that the petition concerned the safety of the Military Road, B6318 and the impact on residents who lived alongside it. He thanked the Petitions Committee for the feedback and commented that the report provided a thorough summary of the safety concerns and highlighting priorities. However, it did not take into account the human aspect

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of living next to the road. Of the four actions identified at the previous meeting, he commented on the following:

- a) Further speed surveys be undertaken at the locations highlighted to identify traffic speeds. Results were awaited for Harlow Hill.
- b) Consideration also be given to strengthening existing advisory signage for HGVs to try to further encourage use of the A68 / A69 for through HGV traffic. Further dialogue be held with main haulage users in the area to encourage use of the A68 / A69 route. He queried whether there had been any dialogue with operators as the same level of HGVs were using the road.

He reported that there were now 20 dwellings within Harlow Hill and in compliance with Department of Transport Circular 01-2013, he believed the speed limit should be reduced from 40mph to 30mph. This would resolve the confusing signage on the Eastbound entrance to Harlow Hill with a 30mph curve sign and 40mph speed limit.

As there hadn't been any drop in traffic, he queried whether the planning permission for West Barrasford Quarry and Swinburn Quarry could be looked at. He referred to Policy TRA2 which suggested that adverse impacts on communities and the environment, including noise and air quality, be minimised. He also supported a suggestion within the report for a legal agreement with hauliers to use another route or use of the planning system.

Neil Snowdon, Principal Programme Officer (Highways Improvement) confirmed that speed survey data had been completed for Harlow Hill in November 2022 and agreed to send this to the lead petitioner. He provided a brief summary:

- The average speed recorded for eastbound traffic was 35.7 mph. The 85th percentile was 40.5 mph.
- The average speed recorded for westbound traffic was 33.8 mph. The 85th percentile was 38.9 mph.
- Based on the above data, vehicles were observing the 40mph speed limit with no criteria for enforcement action.
- Councillor Veronica Jones had agreed to fund a vehicle activated sign (VAS), but the process to obtain scheduled monument consent was lengthy. These signs also collected data which would enable the speeds of vehicles the road to be monitored.
- He had been unable to access a sound clip that had been emailed and requested that it be resent to enable him to forward it to Environmental Health for investigation.
- Signage would be reviewed when that section of the B6318 was considered.
- The issue raised regarding West Barrasford Quarry and Swinburn Quarry would be passed to planning enforcement for investigation, if necessary.

Several members commented on their familiarity with the Military Road, which had always been a fast road. However, they noted the speed survey data which showed speeds within the 40mph limit. They sympathised with problems experienced by residents and commented that there were difficult junctions but were unsure if any further action could be taken other than that identified and discussed.

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It was also noted that public perception often varied to the reality, but it was frightening to stand on the side of the road when a heavy goods vehicle went past, irrespective of the speed they were actually travelling, whether this be 40 mph or more. The Corporate Plan stated that people should love where they live and therefore living in a family home should not be scary and residents should be protected. It was suggested the proximity to roads should be taken into consideration when determining whether planning permission be granted and whether the site was a suitable location for a house to be built.

A member made reference to Circular 185 for vehicle speed measurements which recommended that speed surveys be taken in two separate months with a one-month gap in between with the variation being considered between the two. There was also a reference to neutral months and consideration of the weather conditions and 5mph added if the data had been collected in wet weather. Reference was also made to compliance with the criteria for a 30mph speed limit with 20 or more houses.

The Principal Programme Officer (Highways Improvement) was unable to verify what the weather conditions had been at the time of the previous survey in November but commented that it might be possible to arrange a further speed survey.

In response to questions, it was confirmed that:

- Section 2, which had been identified as the highest priority would be addressed as part of the LTP Programme for 2023/24 and included road markings, signage and removal of vegetation. Any issues in the other areas would be attended to as part of the normal highway's maintenance programme.
- The officer who had prepared the road safety audit for Hollins Hill and Harwood had been asked to take into consideration the finished development to determine whether the 30mph speed limit criteria was met.
- There was generally opposition to rumble strips due to noise complaints where they had been installed.
- Any immediate safety issues such as damaged or missing signs were replaced with like for like straight away on receipt of notification by a third parties or when identified by a Highways Inspector, under the normal maintenance programme. Any enhancement of signage, eg yellow backgrounds would be undertaken as part of the LTP Programme.
- The Portfolio Holder for Local Services had asked if any additional measures were required at junctions with the Military Road to warn drivers using the road.

Members appreciated submission of the petition and subsequent investigation by officers which had been of benefit.

RESOLVED that:

- a) The contents of the report be noted.
- b) The contents of the Road Safety Study, attached as Appendix A to the report, be supported.

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13a **PETITION AGAINST ON-GOING PLANNING ISSUES OF PEDESTRIAN SAFETY AND ACCESS TO LOCAL SERVICES AT ARCOT MANOR/THE FAIRWAYS, CRAMLINGTON**

The Petitions Committee received an update on the petition received from residents of Arcot Manor/The Fairways in respect of on-going planning issues. (A copy of the presentation is enclosed with the signed minutes).

Elizabeth Sinnamon, Development Services Manager shared PowerPoint slides to demonstrate the masterplan for the southwest sector site in Cramlington under planning application reference 15/00901/OUTES which was granted outline consent for approximately 1,600 units in 2015. Various reserved matters applications had been received in the intervening period.

The lead petitioner resided in phase 1 of the development. It was situated on the far left and had consent for 476 units with approximately 324 units built to date. Building had also commenced in another area by Barratt Homes and Keepmoat Homes. The Masterplan required that on occupation of the 800th dwelling, there would be a link road from the bottom of the Arcot Manor site east through the Barratt Homes site into Cramlington town centre.

Currently residents of Arcot Manor were in a landlocked site. The footways would be delivered in time in accordance with the planning consent. Unfortunately, the trigger for delivering the access road and pedestrian footway was some distance away with between 300-400 houses being occupied at present.

Exploratory works had commenced to bring forward a footpath on land owned by the Council. However, this path required careful planning to ensure that land identified for other uses would be developable in the future.

Photographs had been taken of the aforementioned land on recent site visits to demonstrate the site topography which were mid construction, very uneven and awaited installation of flood attenuation features. The land was holding water with a bund of earth on part of the site. For the path to provide a meaningful link, significant engineering operations would be required to construct a footpath and may also require planning consent. At the appropriate stage, consultations would be held with residents on the type of temporary footpath proposed.

From a planning perspective, the development was being built in accordance with the planning consent with the footways to be delivered at some point in the future. Officers were working to scope out a broader short-term plan with colleagues in Property, Local Services and Highways to assess whether there were viable options to bring a suitable footpath in the short term to enable the residents of Arcot Manor to travel east into Cramlington. They were also liaising with the developers, Persimmon and Barratt Homes who were in the process of building on the site.

The following comments were made by members:

- Discussions were taking place regarding the proposed football pitches and

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whether the funds could be used to improve current pitches elsewhere in the town.

- Residents had suggested a temporary footpath to the rear of Azure Garden Centre to link to the Beacon Hill local shop. Whilst a planning application had been received in respect of that site, only a small strip of land would be required. The area was grassed and in better condition than the land in the photographs and would not need the same level of work, except for the removal of a mound of soil. It was suggested this would be more suitable for a temporary footpath until something permanent was constructed.
- Whether there was provision for a cycleway to link to the extensive network already in situ in the town. Separate funding was available for new cycleways and it would be beneficial if the cycleway link could be continued to Northumberlandia which would encourage sustainable local travel.
- A recent demonstration had been stopped by the police who had said the road was not safe for the number of pedestrians to walk alongside the road, contrary to the advice given previously by Highways colleagues.
- Whether the development now qualified for the speed to be reduced from 50mph to 40mph, similar to the speed reduction implemented at East Hartford.
- Support for the installation of a pedestrian crossing which would make the road safer and slow speeds, similar to Moor Farm roundabout.
- Residents had been sold their dream properties, but there was acceptance that little could be done until the trigger of 800 units was reached. However, it should be ensured that infrastructure was put in place earlier in future planning applications.

The Chair noted that there was much to be explored, which was beyond the scope of the committee. Officers were investigating options with colleagues and the developers for a short-term solution for a temporary footpath whilst building progressed on the development to reach the trigger levels of the Section 106 agreement.

In response to questions, the Development Services Manager confirmed that:

- In new applications earlier triggers were now sought for the provision of infrastructure and other matters within Section 106 agreements.
- The football pitches, and associated funding, were an integral part of the formal delivery of some of the planning consents. If this was to change, it may be the case that planning consent would need to be varied.
- The proposed link road included footpaths and a cycleway.
- When discussions had taken place for the site originally, it would never have been envisaged that there would be a walkway out of Arcot Manor to Northumberlandia, unlike the connectivity discussions that now took place.
- The footpath out of Arcot Manor took pedestrians to a central island to access the bus stop on the eastbound side of Fisher Lane. The road had been assessed as acceptable following a level 3 road safety audit and considered safe by Highways Development Management without the need for further intervention. Light controlled crossings were estimated to cost circa £100,000 and would need to be referred to the Head of Technical Services for a feasibility study alongside other request. Pedestrian crossing warning signs were a possibility as it was not known if the criteria for a light controlled crossing would be met.

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- The suggestion that the speed on Fisher Lane be reduced from 50mph to 40mph would be passed to Local Services for review.
- It was understood that Barratt Homes had partly built their link road. Although it was not finished, it did provide a drivable surface. Discussions would continue with the developers as to whether this could be progressed, but this could not be guaranteed as the trigger of 800 occupied units had not yet been reached. This negotiation would also include the footpath and cycleway.
- The original plans for the site had not envisaged a path at the top end of the site.

The Chair queried the logic of funding a temporary footpath in potentially the wrong location. He acknowledged there were some options to be explored, however, time needed to be allowed for these to be progressed. It was therefore suggested that a further update be provided in 12 months or when Planning Officers indicated the trigger had been reached.

RESOLVED that the Petitions Committee noted that:

- a) Provision for a link road and footways were included within the Masterplan for 15/00901/OUTES.
- b) The trigger point for a) above had not been reached.
- c) Officers in Planning were working with the developers and colleagues in Highways, Local Services and Property to scope whether there was a viable short-term solution that would not affect the deliverability of the football pitches etc.
- d) An update be brought back to the Petitions Committee in 12 months.

14 **NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting would be confirmed at the Annual Meeting of Council on 17 May 2023.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....

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Northumberland
County Council

Petitions Committee

27/04/23

www.northumberland.gov.uk

15/00901/OUTES - Masterplan

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Proposed football pitches

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Site plan – indicative footpath









