

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

PETITIONS COMMITTEE

At a virtual meeting of the **Petitions Committee** held on Thursday, 30 July 2020 at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT

Councillor R. Dodd
(Chair, in the Chair)

MEMBERS

Cartie, E.
Foster, J.
Flux, B.

Rickerby, L.
Swinburn, M.

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT

Sanderson, H.G.H.

Portfolio Holder for Environment &
Local Services

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

P. Jones
R. Murfin
N. Snowdon

Ms. N. Turnbull

Service Director - Local Services
Director of Planning
Principal Programme Officer
(Highways Improvement)
Democratic Services Officer

6. PROCEDURE TO BE FOLLOWED AT A VIRTUAL PETITIONS COMMITTEE

The Chair outlined the procedure which would be followed at the virtual meeting and of the changes to the petition protocol.

7. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D. Campbell and T. Cessford.

8. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Petitions Committee held on Wednesday, 31 July 2019, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

Ch.'s Initials.....

9. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Foster declared an interest and would not participate in agenda Item 6.1 'Speeding Vehicles in Stakeford' as she raised the petition.

10. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION, COMMERCIAL & ECONOMY

10.1 Solar Panels on all Newbuilds

The Petitions Committee were requested to acknowledge the petition received requesting that the Council require all new build homes in Northumberland to be built with solar photovoltaics installed and agree the Council's response. (Report filed with the signed minutes as Appendix A).

A statement in support of the petition from Bethan Sproat, the Lead Petitioner, was read out by N Turnbull, Democratic Services Officer. The statement would be attached to the signed copy of the minutes and would be uploaded to the Council's website.

Councillor Sanderson, the Portfolio Holder for Environment & Local Services, which included responsibility for climate change, thanked Ms Sproat for the petition. They were aware of the value of solar panels and PV cells and were installing them when they could. Good progress was being made with the Council's Climate Change Action Plan and they were doing as much as they were able, however, the Council was bound by national and regional policies.

The Director of Planning shared the petitioner's ambition when it came to sustainable construction techniques across the entire built environment and looked for every opportunity for all forms of sustainable construction methods in respect of residential and commercial buildings. However, the Government's Planning Inspectorate needed to be convinced that any additional requirements, beyond national requirements, were financially viable.

He made reference to the current examination process for the approval of the Northumberland Local Plan and the policy asks on the development industry which sought contributions for education, healthcare, affordable housing, public open space and highway works and evidence that these requests would not affect the viability of new build, given the different market conditions across the county. In some areas, they had been unable to seek contributions for affordable housing, as otherwise the development would not be feasible.

The petition requested use of solar pv on all new builds and the Director of Planning did want to be so prescriptive as solar would not be the best cost effective solution for some buildings and some site locations. The Council wanted to incorporate as many sustainable construction technologies as possible and a new policy was included within the Local Plan and was supported by Friends of the Earth. They supported the ideology, however

national legislation needed to change to require it / solar pv on every development, due to the viability argument.

Members of the Petitions Committee noted that:

- Building orientation was an important factor as not all houses were south facing.
- Whilst sympathising with the petition ideology, concerns about the future cost implications and whether house buyers should have a choice.
- Feed in tariffs were no longer as generous and vat had increased from 5% to 20%. Peak demand did not match peak output often occurred when most household occupants were away from the house at work. The resultant requirement for batteries for storage purposes with the associated environmental implications.
- In principle, it was an excellent suggestion at first glance, however, there were many different solutions and they did not think it was right to be too prescriptive requiring one particular method, there should be flexibility to ensure the best option for each property.
- Hydroelectric technology was another method to be considered which ran best in winter when wind turbines were unable to operate.

In response to questions from Committee the following information was provided:-

- Building orientation was important to design discussions and negotiations. Solar PV could give fantastic opportunities for buildings with large roof spaces such as warehouse sheds if aligned correctly. If site restrictions, or constraints such as the shape, did not allow PV, other technologies of sustainable construction might give a better result.
- Building control standards and regulations required improvements to the thermal efficiency of homes and all new properties were expected to be built that way. Due to the importance of the issue, the Government had decided that gas central heating would not be fitted to new homes from 2025 onwards.
- Technological improvements meant that solar panels were becoming more efficient compared to the first generation and the cost per Kwh ratios was improving all the time. It was likely that they would look more like conventional roof tiles in the future.
- At the moment, the evidence suggested that a prescriptive approach was not affordable in terms of housing market conditions in Northumberland. The Government might decide to make it mandatory in the future.
- Homes for Northumberland were checking the environmental impact assessments for its own housing stock to see what efficiencies and improvements could be made in a sustainable way.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) The issues raised in the petition, be noted.
- (b) The Council's approach to solar photovoltaics being installed on all new build homes, be noted.

- (c) The request to require all new build homes to be built with solar photovoltaics installations is not supported for the reasons set out in this report.

The Chair thanked the petitioner and asked them to note that they were listening and acting when it was within the Council's control.

Councillor Foster switched her camera and microphone off and took no part in the following item.

11. REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - LOCAL SERVICES

11.1 Speeding Vehicles in Stakeford

The Petitions Committee were requested to acknowledge receipt of the e-petition received regarding excessive vehicle speeds on the A196 between Stakeford and Guide Post and agree the Council's response. (Report filed with the signed minutes as Appendix B).

A statement in support of the petition from Councillor Julie Foster, the Lead Petitioner, was read out by L Little, Democratic Services Officer. The statement would be attached to the signed copy of the minutes and would be uploaded to the Council's website.

Councillor Sanderson, the Portfolio Holder for Environment & Local Services, commented that speeding vehicles was a common problem throughout the country and a strict and disciplined approach was required. Monitoring was required in areas where issues were identified but sometimes perception was different to reality. The approach adopted needed to be fair, transparent and equal to all. Some Members had funded solutions through their Members' Local Improvement allowance and this was one of the key uses of the fund.

The Principal Programme Officer (Highways Improvement) reported that the results of the speed surveys regrettably did not meet the current speed criteria for enforcement, the 85th percentile needed to be 35mph or above. However, the information would be passed to Northumbria Police as there was an identified issue in the evening by 'boy racers' and it was hoped that they would take appropriate action by neighbourhood officers. He added that Northumbria Police were working on a new enforcement strategy which it was hoped would be in place in September 2020. The current process was lengthy and it was hoped that the issue would meet the criteria in the new strategy which would allow other areas to be included in the monitoring of known problem areas.

An 20mph advisory speed in the area at school start and finish times seemed to be working and this would be monitored when schools went back in September.

In response to a question regarding the location of the speed enforcement cameras, the Service Director - Local Services commented that the Council

worked with the police and others as part of the Northumbria Safer Roads Initiative (NSRI) which included looking at enforcement arrangements on an evidence led basis. Officers worked with the police to identify areas of speeding concern to ensure locations were targeted and where the camera enforcement vehicle could be safely parked. Officers had requested a more even spread instead of a focus on busier locations. The police had been responsive and were working to make sure resources were best targeted to help reduce vehicle speeds at locations where this was identified as being a concern in order to improve road safety.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Local Services commented that the speed van should be deployed at locations based on accident data and where there were safety issues. Locations had been more varied recently.

Members of the Petitions Committee noted that:

- Similar speeding problems regularly occurred in their own wards.
- Some Members had purchased hand held cameras used by volunteers which resulted in motorists receiving a letter from the police.
- Information regarding locations where speeding was a known issue and monitored by the police was available on the NSRI website.
- The number of complaints regarding speeding vehicles had increased since lockdown

RESOLVED that:

- (a) The Committee noted that officers were working with Northumbria Police and all Local Authorities in the force area to develop a new enforcement strategy which will assist the police with dealing with this type of issue. The petition will form part of the evidence gathering process and be forwarded to the Camera Enforcement Unit for further investigation and necessary action.
- (b) It was noted that preliminary design work was to be funded by Councillor Foster through her Members Local Improvement Scheme allowance which would allow the design team to identify possible measures which would encourage reduced vehicle speeds along this route.
- (c) Depending on the scale of measures proposed during preliminary design, it be agreed that these may need to be considered for inclusion in a future Local Transport Plan Programme following the assessment process, as funding was already allocated for 2020/21.

Councillor Foster returned and recommenced participation in the meeting at this point.

11.2 Petition requesting to erect a fence or barrier between Crofton Grange Estate and land opposite Stardale Avenue Blyth

The Petitions Committee were requested to acknowledge the recently received petition and respond to petitioners and the Local Area Council on the issues raised. (Report filed with the signed minutes as Appendix C).

The Service Director - Local Services outlined the report including the land ownership issues, children's safety and the necessity to reinstate damaged areas from deep ruts which were a trip hazard for pedestrians.

Under normal circumstances, the Council would not normally invest in fencing on land it did not own. However due to the aforementioned reasons, prevention of vehicle movement across the green space and removing the need to undertake annual repairs for public safety, it was recommended that birdsmouth fencing be installed near Wooler Grange at a cost of £2,250 from the grounds maintenance budget.

Discussions about the issue had been held with Councillor Grant Davey, the local Councillor for the ward, who had agreed to fund the fencing near Stardale Avenue out of his Members Local Improvement Scheme allowance, at a cost of £4,850. This would be accepted as it would be preferable to have fencing erected at both locations to close off vehicular access to the green space from both areas.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment & Local Services expressed his appreciation to the petitioner for organising the petition and raising awareness that vehicles crossing the land were putting pedestrians lives at risk and causing costly damage to the land. He thanked the officers and local member for finding a solution to the problem.

Members' agreed with the proposed solution and moved the recommendation.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) The contents of the report, including the work undertaken by the Council's Neighbourhood Services Team who has given careful consideration over how to prevent vehicles driving across the open grassed area between Stardale and Crofton Grange estate, be noted.
- (b) The proposal from the Neighbourhood Services Team will arrange for the erection of birdsmouth fencing at Wooler Grange to help address the safety concerns being raised and also to reduce the damage being caused to this grassed area of open space, be noted.
- (c) The birdsmouth fencing near Stardale Avenue be funded by The local Councillor for the Kitty Brewster ward, be noted.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on Thursday, 29 October 2020 at 2.00 p.m.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____