

minutes



Meeting HIGHWAYS SELECT COMMITTEE

Date Monday, 6 November 2006 (commencing at 10.30 am)

Membership

Persons absent are marked with `A`

COUNCILLORS

The Hon Joan Taylor (Chair)
Andy Stewart (Vice-Chair)

Jen Cole
Bruce Laughton
Jim Napier
Philip Owen

Sheila Place
Ken Rigby
David Shaw

MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting held on 9 October 2006, having been circulated were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no declarations of interest.

ISSUES ARISING FROM CLOSURE OF GRAVELLY HOLLOW, CALVERTON

Councillor Mark Spencer gave a presentation about the impact of the closure of Gravelly Hollow, Calverton at its junction with the A614. He gave apologies from the community representatives who had hoped to be at the meeting.

Councillor Spencer explained that the junction had been closed for 18 months from March 2006 to assess the impact of this on accidents. He recognised that this was a dangerous junction, with three people killed and six seriously injured in the last ten years. He suspected however that accidents would increase at the junctions either side which traffic now had to use. He referred to the longer routes now being taken from Calverton and villages to the east, especially to reach the M1. His preferred option was that the junction be improved and re-opened, either as a roundabout or controlled by traffic lights.

Councillor Taylor asked about the level of objections to the closure. Councillor Spencer replied that the closure was the biggest issue in Calverton at the present time. In reply to Councillor Owen, Councillor Spencer said that there had been proper consultation in advance of the closure.

Chris Charnley, Acting Group Manager (Highway Management) explained that consultation had begun in September 2005, and 12 letters of objection had been received by 14 November. The Cabinet Member had approved the temporary traffic regulation order in December, and the experimental closure took effect from March 2006. There then followed a six month period during which people could make objections. Fourteen letters of objection had been received, along with a petition presented at County Council. There had been no letters of support. Before the temporary closure could be confirmed, the Cabinet Member for Environment would receive a report on consultation, objections and the impact of the closure.

Councillors Stewart and Laughton referred to the objections from residents of Oxton to the closure, which the parish council believed had increased traffic through the village. Councillor Laughton queried why alternatives to closure had not been considered.

Suzanne Heydon, Accident Investigation Team, explained the constraints on the alternatives to closure. The preferred alternative would have been an off-line roundabout, but this would have cost some £2m. When responsibility for the A614 transferred from the Highways Agency to the County Council, only a sum equivalent to the cost of the closure had been passed to the County Council. She stated that the 18 month experimental closure would provide a year's accident statistics, on which the impact of the closure would be assessed. She observed that at the adjacent junctions, accidents were continuing at their historic levels.

In reply to members' questions, Ms Heydon explained that traffic lights would require re-alignment of the road to improve visibility, with an estimated cost of some £1m. She identified the drawbacks of other measures which members had suggested. Mr Charnley pointed out that closure was regarded as the last resort, because of the inconvenience to people.

NEWARK TOWN COUNCIL'S PERSPECTIVE

Councillor Harry Molyneux gave Newark Town Council's perspective on traffic problems in Newark. He apologised that Councillor Foster had not been able to attend as planned. He referred to the increased traffic arising from new industry and housing which worsened congestion, the problems caused by the level crossing and misuse of blue badges, and the need for a one-way system.

Mr Charnley agreed that Newark was under pressure from traffic. The level crossing was a hard problem to solve, given its location. A one-way system would involve long routes around the town centre, which would affect nearby residents as well as other traffic. Councillor Cole observed that there were similar industrial and housing developments in other towns in the county, generating additional traffic and parked vehicles. Councillor Napier believed that there would always be traffic problems in historic towns with insufficient road space. In reply to Councillor Rigby, Mr Charnley said that section 106 monies could be used for highway improvement, but the options were limited in a town like Newark. Councillor Molyneux pointed out that the Town Council had asked for a new junction to the A1 to provided through section 106.

Councillor Cole referred to the small number of occasions when the highways authority objected to a planning application. Mr Charnley believed that the authority gave reasons for its views on planning applications, even when it had no objections. He pointed out that the members' briefings now listed planning applications on which the highways authority would be making comments. This was the opportunity for members to give their views. In relation to members' wider concerns, he stated that the authority had to operate within national guidelines, and that if a development caused traffic to increase by 5%, mitigation could be considered.

VILLAGE GATEWAYS AND INTERACTIVE SIGNS

Mr Charnley introduced the report, and showed a DVD of examples of different types of village gateway and interactive signs in various parts of the county. He summarised the cost of installation and impact of the two measures. He drew attention to the value of having a speed management policy, which also included education and enforcement. He pointed out that the Cabinet Member had agreed to a review of speed limits, and she was keen to receive the Select Committee's views on policies.

Councillor Laughton congratulated the Cabinet Member on her pro-active attitude to interactive signs. He referred positively to the sign in Upton, but wondered about the longevity and maintenance costs of the signs. Councillor Stewart believed that these were the first signs to have an effect on traffic speeds. He added that the criteria for mobile signs should recognise that villages had less traffic than urban areas, and reflect the circumstances of particular villages. Councillor Owen supported the concept of a speed management policy. He believed that interactive signs had shown their effectiveness, while at the same time not causing offence to motorists. He saw scope for installing many more before proliferation diminished their impact. Councillor Rigby also supported having a speed management policy, and preferred interactive signs to village gateways.

Councillor Napier wondered how the criteria for interactive signs were set, and whether there were economies of scale. Ms Heydon explained that the signs in Burton Joyce had been developed by her team in conjunction with a manufacturer. She observed that there were only a limited number of sites where the traffic flowed in a way that would make this particular type of sign effective. She wished the Transport and Road Research Laboratory to study their effectiveness before any decision was taken to install this type elsewhere.

In response to some of the comments, Mr Charnley stated that an interactive sign cost about £150 pa to maintain, that the Cabinet Member was considering an interim paper with members' suggestions for new locations, and that the criteria may need revisiting. He indicated that currently the authority would only accept funding from a partner organisation for a scheme which met the criteria.

WORK PROGRAMME

Martin Gately, Scrutiny Officer, reported that the programme for the following meetings of the Select Committee was as follows:

27 November 2006	RoSPA and the King's Clipstone Campaign Group
18 December 2006	Chief Constable
15 January 2007	RAC, Norwich Union and the Motorcycle Forum.

The meeting closed at 12.45 pm.

CHAIR

Ref: highways select/m_6nov06