

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE HELD ON 30TH APRIL, 2018

Present: Councillor Mrs B E Allen, (Chair),
R Arthur, E Bell, Mrs J A Bell, Mrs K Brace,
S Cudlip, Mrs S Forster, Mrs R M Gratton,
G N Hepworth, Mrs L Kennedy,
D McKenna.

Apologies:

Prior to commencement of the meeting the Chair advised members of this Committee and members of the public that in line with the amendment to 'the public bodies (admission to meetings) act 1960', which came into force in August, 2014, parts of this meeting may be recorded by photographic, video and audio means.

1. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Members were reminded prior to the start of the meeting of the need to disclose any interests, prejudicial or personal, in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

2. SPECIAL MEETING TO DISCUSS THE TRAFFIC PROBLEMS IN SEAHAM AND ANY OTHER ISSUES WHICH MAY ARISE

The Chair welcomed Mr Ron Hogg, Durham Police and Crime Commissioner and Mr David Battensby, Durham County Council to the meeting.

The Chair stated that a member of the public had stated that the meeting had not been well advertised. It was noted that Council staff had advertised on the notice board, on Facebook and also in the Sunderland Echo.

The Chair informed Members and members of the public that the order of the meeting would be to discuss the traffic problems on Stockton Road/Station Road, the crime spates in Church Street and then the traffic problems at Seaham Lodge.

Mr Hogg stated that he was attending tonight's meeting to answer questions with regards to the two roads which were causing concern which are Stockton Road and Station Road, where drivers are jumping red lights and speeding and he wanted to understand what the problems are and where they are.

A Member questioned how effective road testing was. In October 2017 speed sensors were fitted on Station Road and Northlea Road which did bring about a change in the habits of some people and it appeared that word had got round quite quickly. Mr Hogg stated that he would like to think that speed sensors does have an impact. The Member questioned whether there would be any alternatives to use. Mr Hogg stated that there are hand held speed guns. The Police can issue tickets for speeding and this needs more enforcement.

A Member stated that what is needed in the whole of Seaham is a fully integrated

traffic plan and survey with all organisations being involved in the survey and plan. Seaham has grown massively for the last few years but the infrastructure hasn't grown with it. Investment needs to be made. Mr Hogg stated that he would be happy to work with the Town Council on this to take it forward. The Member stated that pressure could be put on Durham County Council for this to happen. Mr Hogg stated that he would be willing to put his full weight behind this measure.

A Member stated that she has heard a lot about Seaham Lodge and there are a lot of unhappy people this should be one of the foremost things that is looked at.

A member of the public questioned why there weren't any speed cameras on Seaton Lane which appears to be the main road coming into Seaham and people speed through there and why doesn't County Durham as a whole have speed cameras like Sunderland has. Mr Hogg stated that it has been a policy that County Durham don't have speed cameras because the issue with speed cameras is that they should be there to solve a particular problem but what happens is if you do solve the problem it is just persecuting people who may be doing 2-3 mph more than they should. The policy had Durham Constabulary is to use mobile cameras hence the number of vans and the laser guns so the actual problem can be dealt with and make the problem go away. A member of the public questioned how often the speed cameras are there. Mr Hogg was unsure of this question and stated he would come back with a response to this question. He was here tonight to listen to what the problems in Seaham are which he can take away from this meeting and look into them further.

A member of the public stated that the spot between the Lodge Garage and Seaham Grange (Glebe Estate entrance) certainly needs to be looked at via a survey because people drive along there at a fantastic speed.

A member of the public stated that she lives at Seaton Lane and she is so worried about the noise she can hear outside, people are crashing into each other on the corner, people shouting at each other and the use of foul language. Mr Hogg questioned what times of the day this is happening. The member of the public stated that it used to be at peak times only but is now all day long. Mr Hogg asked the member of the public to leave her details and he will visit her property personally as it makes it a stronger case when Mr Hogg witnesses things for himself. It was noted that lots of cars go through the traffic lights when they are on red.

A member of the public stated that it wasn't just about speeding issues on Seaton Lane people don't appear to be taking notice and the lollipop lady has nearly been hit a few times. Mr Hogg stated that when traffic is analysed speeding is not always the biggest contributor, it is usually because people are not paying attention and have poor driving skills. Mr Hogg stated that from this meeting he has some short term actions such as he will visit the member of the public at Seaton Lane and see what the issues are there and he will link in with the Police to see what can be done with some of the key areas that are being discussed. A survey would take longer but that doesn't mean things can't be done in the meantime.

A member of the public stated that speeding is an issue and there is a bigger issue with the junction at Seaton Lane. There is an action plan which an Officer has at Durham County Council. The action plan includes having a camera on the lights as well as upgrading the traffic lights along with the original plan which raised the issue

of the third filter lane and it is important that it is acknowledged that there are wider issues because the infrastructure has not been put in place with the amount of traffic. Seaton Lane is a lane not a main road and residents are really worried about pedestrian safety as there are HGV's coming down the lane. There are small children who attend New Seaham Primary School who walk down there every day with HGV's passing them. When drivers are coming from Sunderland and have to turn right at the traffic lights they are going through red lights, the traffic lights are not working. Mr Hogg acknowledged that there was a structural problem there. It was noted that there is a further meeting with Durham County Council this week to discuss the issues. A further issue is the third filter lane which Mr Hogg had been informed about formally by a letter from the Residents Committee which was about residents reversing onto three lanes of traffic. All of these issues are around the infrastructure not being in place.

A Member questioned whether a short term fix would be for the HGV's to be re-directed to come into Seaham via a different route. Mr Hogg stated that if the Town Council know the companies which are using this route he would personally write to the companies pointing out what the issues are and ask them to use alternative routes. He couldn't promise that they would do that but he would share the letter with the Chair. A member of the public stated that she had a list of the HGV companies who were using the lane but there was a lot of HGV's that don't have company names on them.

A member of the public questioned whether Durham Police could carry out a survey similar to what Cleveland Police are carrying out around the schools about how parents are parking. Mr Hogg stated that he had been doing that for years and Cleveland are copying what Durham have been doing. It is one of the most frustrating things that Mr Hogg has to deal with and dealing with the mentality of people who just park where they want. They have worked with school children who have issued tickets to their parents and asked the children to get their parents to explain why they park incorrectly. They have organised walking buses so children and parents walk to school to reduce the number of vehicles. Mr Hogg stated that he would be happy to look at what they can do but sadly some people just don't care about other people and do what they want.

A member of the public asked whether some drone footage could be taken of the Seaton Lane junction to show what the issues are and would give a bigger impact of what residents are suffering at peak times and Sundays when the car boot sale is on and people jumping the lights to try and turn right. A Member stated that this is not about being 5 days per week and having peace on a weekend on a Sunday when the car boot sale is on it is gridlocked. It is just as dangerous with the car boot being on the sea front and it is impossible to get down there without near misses. Once cars get onto the B1285 going up towards Westlea that is a free for all for speed as well. Mr Hogg stated that he regularly visits Seaham on a Sunday and he is regularly caught up in what the Member has described. The Member stated that when Durham County Council are informed of the traffic they say there isn't a problem.

A member of the public stated that she lives in Burdon Crescent and it is difficult to exit the estate on foot. There is no access to cross the road as you are faced with cars and lorries and some safety precautions need to be considered for this.

A member of the public stated that there is going to be another 800 houses built and pollution is bad already specially between 8.30-4.30 and the school children are breathing in all sorts 5 days per week. What is needed is a new road. Mr Hogg stated that he can't do that but he will bring this up as it needs to be looked at. When new developments are suggested then the problems this will cause need to be looked at and this needs to be looked at with Sunderland Council to see how the problems can be alleviated.

A member of the public suggested that the car boot sale should be moved from where it currently is. There used to be a car boot sale on the way to Houghton. As residents we should be able to say we want the car boot sale stopped because it is absolutely gridlocked there. Seaham is growing and it is fantastic down the sea front with what has been done but it needs to be taken into consideration that the population is growing and Seaham will be even bigger. Seaham can't cope with what it has now. Mr Hogg stated that he totally agreed with the comments and said there has been tremendous works done down the sea front which attracts visitors which is added traffic. The whole thing needs to be looked at. In the short term could the license for the car boot sale be changed from the sea front as it doesn't need to be there. It was noted that it is private land owned by the farmer and it was questioned how long there is permission for the car boot to take place. Mr Battensby stated that the farmer was granted planning permission and there is no license so he has planning permission to run this with no end date. It was questioned whether this could be changed as a change of circumstance as in the beginning it was a few hundred cars now it is thousands. Mr Battensby stated that planning permission can't be changed without good grounds to do so. A Member asked if this could be reviewed and that it should be reviewed as a matter of urgency because of all of the dangers which have been discussed.

A member of the public stated that all of the issues are on the action plan with Durham County Council including the car boot sale. It was agreed to share the action plan with Mr Hogg so he can push this further. It was also noted that with the proposed third lane at Seaton Lane this will encourage more traffic to come into Seaham. Residents were concerned about reversing into three lanes of oncoming traffic. The drives at Seaton Lane are not big enough for residents to turn their cars around so they would either have to reverse onto their drives when coming home or reverse into three lanes when leaving home. Mr Hogg stated that this hasn't happened yet and that it needs to be shown what the plan and survey informs on.

A member of the public stated that the plans were kept secretive and only one resident was told about the third lane. The new housing would have gone ahead and been built if it wasn't for this resident receiving the letter. Mr McGargill has attended a meeting at the Town Hall twice now and has faced questioning from residents. He was informed that the road is already dangerous and would be made worse if the plans go ahead. The plans need to be re-looked at and to start again. There has been a 500% increase in the number of HGV's coming down Seaton Lane. It was felt that Seaton Lane had been left adrift when other areas have had traffic calming measures put in place.

A Member stated that at the first meeting about Seaton Lane she had informed Planners that it was Sunderland Council's problem and it is wrong that people in County Durham should be persecuted for Sunderland's problem. The Highways Department need to get the roads sorted out. A Member stated that she had

spoken to the Mayor of Sunderland about this issue and she was going to take it back to the Planning Department at Sunderland.

A member of the public stated that she had contacted the Police and was informed that if she causes an accident while reversing into the road that she would be prosecuted. Mr Hogg stated that he understood residents' concerns and that he will look into what he can do.

A further concern raised was the safety aspects of the entrance and exit from the new High School coming onto Station Road. Some of the road has yellow lines but there are lots of cars parked on either side of the road at 3.05pm. Children are coming out of the school and pushing and shoving each other and running across the road. A member of the public stated that someone will be killed on that road and he was concerned about the welfare of the children. Mr Hogg asked whether anyone had contacted the school with regards to the finishing times being staggered which would be one way of controlling the issue. A member of the public stated that the infrastructure in Seaham isn't big enough, there are 500 houses planned and a further 1500 planned at the Garden Village. The High School has stated that it will have to be expanded to accommodate this and this will create an even bigger traffic problem.

A Member stated that there is a lot of traffic parked on Station Road from NHS staff at the Old Vicarage. The school car park is a third empty during the day. If the NHS staff could use the school car park this would alleviate some of the problem. A Member stated that she had previously worked at the High School and health and safety dictates that cars can't go into the school car park. There was originally meant to be 3 entrances but the school didn't get the permission for this. Mr Battensby questioned whether the cars were parent's cars. A Member stated that it was NHS staff and the rest of the time it was around the schools finishing times which would be parent's cars. It was noted that the NHS staff used to park in the Town Hall car park but have now since started to park on the road and they even park on the double yellow lines.

A Member stated that he fully supported the suggestion made by another Member of Seaham having a proper integrated survey and it is long overdue. With the potential application which effects the Lodge Garage there does seem to be an abject failure within the planning system at Durham County Council. This relates to undue influences being attached to the 900 houses which are proposed in the Sunderland boundaries at Ryhope. It is quite clear that all of those houses cannot be built unless there is a suitable highway planning reasons that would allow them to be built with satisfactory access. The only way that can happen at the moment without the slip road is for them to utilise the Lodge junction for access to the A19. It shouldn't be allowed. If Durham County as a planning authority were exercising their powers correctly then they ought to be saying to Sunderland that they cannot be built. Durham are not responsible for solving Sunderland Council's planning issues, Sunderland themselves have to do that and the Member suggested that Mr Hogg adds his weight to the views of the residents and Town Council in saying to Durham this shouldn't be allowed. Applications such as this can be turned down if there aren't enough highway reasons for granting permission. Durham County Council's Planning Department shouldn't be supporting the application but they appear to be supporting this in letting it happen. The Town Council and residents

would appreciate Mr Hogg's support. Seaham have their own problems to solve as we don't have the infrastructure and hopefully the Residents Group will provide a way forward with their action plan that is satisfactory for everyone. Seaham can't and shouldn't be solving Sunderland's problems.

A Member reiterated that what is needed is a fully integrated detailed traffic plan for Seaham. Durham County Council should be supporting Seaham residents not Sunderland residents. Seaham are lucky as there are no car parking charges and everyone from Sunderland comes to Seaham, but we need the support of people like Mr Hogg to support the residents here. All of the points raised today are due to a poor integrated plan which hasn't been done.

A member stated that there are a row of elderly people's homes on Station Road and due to the parking at the school an Ambulance couldn't get through and it had to park in the middle of the road because no one would move their vehicles. Seaham is saturated with traffic now and more roads need to be built. New houses cannot be built until there are new roads.

Mr Hogg stated that many years ago he was a Superintendent at Sunderland and the area he had was Ryhope and Pennywell and he was driving crime down. Mr Hogg was interviewed one day by the press who stated that crime was going down in Sunderland but was rising in County Durham. He was linking in with Durham Constabulary and that's what needs to happen now and these are the actions that Mr Hogg stated he would take away:

1. To arrange a day at Seaham to link in with Councillors and members of the public so that we can try and see personally what the issues are so everyone is working together. The Acting Town Clerk to arrange this.
2. Residents to furnish Mr Hogg with the date, time and location of the meeting and he will try and send a member of his team to the meeting with Dave Waver so he is aware of what is happening with that issue.
3. Mr Hogg will write to all of the HGV companies that are using Seaton Lane if the member of the public can share the list she has and Mr Hogg will share the letter with the Town Council.
4. Mr Hogg entirely supports an integrated traffic survey and plan and this will need to be reviewed.
5. Mr Hogg will write to Sunderland City Council with regard to the junction at Seaham Lodge and copy in Northumbria Police so they are aware of the concerns.
6. Mr Hogg will look into using drones but it will be subsequent to visits and they will look at where the problem areas are. This will give a perspective of what and where the problems are. Residents and Councillors can determine what time these are used as they are only usable for 20 minutes at a time. The Force have access to 2 drones so they can be rotated for quite some time.

7. Mr Hogg noted that the car boot sale was not his area but he will look into what the issues are and see if something can be done. He will be in contact with the County Council, Local Councillors and County Councillors.
8. Mr Hogg will look into the issues around schools parking.

Mr Hogg noted that he knows he will get support from local Councillors to look into these issues. On a personal level he enjoys coming to Seaham on a Sunday afternoon it's a pleasure and is good for the local economy. It must be ensured that everything is done safely and the views and the safety of the residents is taken into consideration as well.

A member of the public suggested that a park and ride system could be put in place to alleviate the traffic. A Member stated that is being looked into with Spectrum Business Park.

A Member stated that he receives a lot of phone calls from residents which should go to the Police. When the Member informs people to go to the Police they say it's a waste of time contacting the Police. The Member stated that the precept had gone up by over 7% so does that equate to extra Police Officers. Mr Hogg stated that it didn't.

The Member shared an experience which occurred at Dawdon Community Centre where a person carrying out their community service stole some equipment. The Police were informed of this but there was no Police response for a few days. If the Police had come earlier they may have got the equipment back but by the time the Police went to this person's house the items were gone. The person in question was on a suspended sentence and could have been arrested. The Community Centre had to contact the Police a second time to come out and the Officer said there was no log of the original call. Mr Hogg stated that it is part of his job to hold the Police to account and he could track the original call down and ask why it wasn't logged. Mr Hogg requested that if anything like this happened again to contact his office who would take this up.

A Member stated that it is his perception that anti-social behaviour is getting worse and there appears to be problems in every street. It appears that the power of the law has disappeared. Some anti-social powers were handed to the local authorities but they don't work after certain hours. It seems that there are no laws to deal with these people. Mr Hogg stated that as the Police are getting smaller there is more need for organisations to work together. Mr Hogg stated that he does address these issues with Durham County Council. The drugs legislation is not working. The Police will continue to target organised drugs groups but operations can take between 6-12 months while intelligence is being gathered. This can cost up to £1m to operate one of these types of operations.

A Member stated that a lot of people appear to get away with the proceeds of crime money and questioned when this money is recovered who receives it. Mr Hogg stated that the Police get some of the money but the Police want more of this money especially in times when the Police budget is being cut. Primarily it is the Police Officers who are doing the work on the ground to get the convictions. Some of the assets maybe houses or cars and it can take 3-4 years to get the money due

to the legal process. The Police are asking for this to be more streamlined and for more money to be coming direct to them.

A Member stated that there had been a problem in Church Street and shopkeepers had been complaining. The Member had rang the local PSCO and asked if Officers could be seen in Church Street which they have done at least twice per day and people now appear to be calmer and feel safer as they can see uniforms in the area.

A Member stated that she felt the Police in our area do a good job with what they have got. They have been involved in the anti-social behaviour with drugs and alcohol abuse in Deneside Park area especially on a Friday night. The Police, Councillors, Durham County Council and DISC have provided an outreach worker to work with the young people. As the light nights are coming in the behaviour gets worse and they are hopefully going to run his programme throughout the summer months. The Town Council are playing a major part by providing CCTV and are hoping to eradicate the drugs and alcohol abuse. Mr Hogg stated that there are two things, the Police and it is everyone's responsibility to do Policing and that is why what you are doing is excellent and brings everyone together. We should all remember that we all have a responsibility to try and tackle these kinds of issues and there are different ways in which it can be done.

A Member stated that there are a number of people in the area who are afraid to contact the Police due to repercussions. Mr Hogg stated that he didn't see much evidence of repercussions. People can contact County Councillors who will pass on concerns to the Police. Mr Hogg's office can be contacted and people's names will be kept confidential. There is also Crimestoppers which can be contacted and names will not be used.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting.