

At a meeting of the PLANNING AND HIGHWAYS COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on MONDAY, 20TH FEBRUARY, 2012 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Tye in the Chair

Councillors Ball, Copeland, Curran, Fletcher, Forbes, T. Foster, Francis, E. Gibson, Howe, Kay, Lauchlan, T. Martin, Padgett, D. Richardson, J. Scott, Tate, Thompson, Wood and A. Wright.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Charlton, Ellis, Essl, Gallagher and P. Watson.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Committee held on Tuesday, 24th January, 2012

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last Committee held on Tuesday, 24th January, 2012 be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the date of the meeting being amended from 21st January to 24th January.

Report of the Meeting of the Development Control (North Sunderland) Sub-Committee held on 1st February, 2012

The report of the meeting of the Development Control (North Sunderland) Sub-Committee held on 1st February, 2012 (copy circulated) was submitted.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Report of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Development Control (Hetton, Houghton and Washington) Sub-Committee held on 31st January, 2012

The report of the extraordinary meeting of the Development Control (Hetton, Houghton and Washington) Sub-Committee held on 31st January, 2012 (copy circulated) was submitted.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Tate referred to application 11/02873/FUL: Plot 19C Hetton Lyons Industrial Estate and requested that the final paragraph of the minutes in relation to this, before the minute of the vote which was taken, include the following:-

In addition, by virtue of its detrimental visual and environmental impact, the proposed operation of the site would deter other businesses from setting up within the Industrial Estate, which would prejudice its future vitality and economic viability.

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted subject to the inclusion of the comment above.

Washington Bus Link Improvement Schemes – Formal Objection

The Executive Director of City Services submitted a report (copy circulated) to inform the Committee of a formal objection received to the proposed bus link improvement schemes at nine bus links in Washington.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Craig Wilkinson, Senior Project Engineer presented the report and was on hand to answer Members queries.

Councillor Padgett commented that the general feeling was that taxis always had been allowed to use the links due to them being public service vehicles. If they were not permitted to use the bus links it would result in long detours. In particular he felt the bus link at Barmston was a separate case, and felt it would be better served by allowing taxis through this particular bus link and introducing a pedestrian crossing instead.

Councillor T. Martin commented that there were examples of this across the city, resulting in longer journeys for taxis, an issue which had come before Licensing Committees in the past. Taxis are public service vehicles and this should be taken into account generally, but Councillor Martin also commented that he realised this may not always be the case if certain areas were deemed dangerous.

Councillor Wood advised that a number of discussions at various meetings have been had on the issue of bus links, and there needs to be a joined up approach to the issue. He felt that as taxis were the only form of public transport which operated 24/7 they should be allowed to use the links.

Councillor Wood also commented that it did not appear to make sense for the links to remain bus only 24/7 as buses did not operate all day, and felt that allowing taxis to use the links would help reduce CO² omissions. He therefore advised that he would support a decision to uphold the objection from Washington Hackney Operators Association.

Councillor E. Gibson enquired if any complaints had been made from the public in the area on this issue as these would need to be taken into consideration.

Councillor Thompson commented that historically the links were actually pedestrian areas which the buses were allowed to use. They are a different concept to the bus routes such as on the A690. He felt the Committee should follow the public opinion for the bus links to be maintained as they are, for bus use only.

Councillor Francis supported Councillor Martin's views and commented that the abuse of bus links was usually by cars and had nothing to do with taxis. He felt the users of taxis could become confused if they were taken on a longer route, and that the Council should be aiming to keep costs down for the public.

Councillor Tate commented that he understood the dilemma and the need for safety, so would not oppose the Washington Members' proposals, but did feel there was a need for greater clarity/standardisation for the usage of bus links.

Councillor Padgett enquired if the scheme for Barmston could be left until the new plans for the area were completed.

The Chairman commented that he did sympathise with the Washington Members' concerns and would like to find a middle ground on the issue.

Mr. Wilkinson advised that blanket taxi access everywhere was not appropriate and needed to be based on individual merits whilst also considering local concerns raised by Councillors. Historically the previous traffic orders at these locations did not allow taxis to use them but it had been accepted that there were great difficulties for the Police to enforce this, which was why the Council had investigated the issue.

Through the results of consultations it was found that a village centre feel was requested and steps to try and minimise traffic use would help the Police to enforce and promote the amenity of the area and safety. Mr. Wilkinson also advised that they could review the individual sites in the future as the Council had powers to re-consult and amend the orders in due course if needed.

In response to Councillor Padgett's request, in relation to holding back the Barmston proposals until the end of April, Mr. Wilkinson advised that he did not think it would be possible to implement the nine schemes in part and he would have to seek legal advice.

Mr. Wilkinson also advised that the alternative routes were not significant distances with a possible one mile diversion. It was a difficult balance to get right when also considering safety issues and the amenity of the area.

Councillor Kay referred to the bus links in the City Centre which taxis were allowed to use and commented that he was not a fan of this due to safety reasons and the public's perception that only buses could use these. However he understood Councillor Padgett's request in relation to Barmston, which may be a separate case if it could be isolated from the other schemes, but clarity was needed.

The Chairman commented that he was mindful to propose a deferral of the item to allow further discussions.

Mr. Wilkinson referred to the delegated decisions and the feedback received from the community on the specific proposals and advised that in relation to the Barmston link 85 properties had received the questionnaire, 34 had responded and in relation to the question asked 'should the proposed changes be implemented?' 22 stated yes, 7 no difference and 5 stated no.

Councillor Padgett enquired if the questionnaire had been circulated before the flats/shops had been demolished in Barmston. Mr. Wilkinson advised that it was issued before, so there would have been an awareness of the situation.

Councillor Scott commented that he agreed with the proposal to defer the item.

Councillor Wood commented that he would be happy to defer and felt that 22 favourable responses out of 85 properties consulted was not an overwhelming endorsement of the scheme.

Councillor Thompson wished to clarify that through the results of the consultations for other areas of Washington, one of the bus links would actually be closed, which indicated how strongly the public felt on the matter. As most of the bus links were located near schools he felt there was a need to weigh up public safety over potential increases in taxi fares.

The Chairman commented that there was a worry over the public's perception of bus links and the possible presumption that taxis could use these, and felt the item should be deferred to enable further discussions and consideration, and to possibly allow further consultation if necessary

4. RESOLVED that the item be deferred pending further discussions, consideration and possible consultation.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting.

(Signed) P. TYE,
Chairman.