

MINUTES of MEETING of the MIDLOTHIAN COUNCIL PETITIONS

COMMITTEE held in the Council Chambers, Midlothian House, Buccleuch Street, Dalkeith, on Tuesday, 25 June 2013 at 10.00 am.

Present:- Councillors Rosie (Chair), Baxter, Coventry, Muirhead, Russell and de Vink.

Apology for Absence:- Councillor Coventry.

1 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Baxter advised that he had previously been involved with issues of traffic management in Lasswade village in his capacity as one of the local members for the Bonnyrigg Ward but that he had not been involved in the matter of either organising or supporting the petition before the Committee at item no.4 hereof. He accordingly intended to participate in the consideration thereof.

2 Minutes

The Minutes of Meeting of 14 May 2013 were submitted and approved.

3 Procedure

The Committee noted the procedure to be followed in hearing petitions as approved by the Council on 25 September 2012.

4 Petition: 20 mph Speed Limit in Lasswade Village

There was submitted report, dated 17 June 2013, by the Head of Customer Services in respect of a petition containing 254 signatures from Janet Jerome, 2a Elm Row, Lasswade, in the following terms, viz:-

"Plea

This petition seeks to create an enhanced and safe road environment for the residents of Midlothian's Conservation Village of Lasswade by, creating a "20's Plenty" speed limit on the A768 High Street and its adjacent feeder roads as outlined on the appended map.

Critical Factors

1. Over the past three years, the growth of housing developments in Midlothian has resulted in an ever increasing volume of traffic using the A768. Although access to and from Polton Road has been improved, access to Westmill Wynd, School Green and Lasswade Park has become increasingly hazardous. Also, the Laird and Dog car park, G2G3 premises and all the Village residents who have a driveway adjacent to the A:768, find it

increasing difficult to join the road as the traffic flow is too fast, even at 30 mph, to enter the main road safely.

2. The road at the Bridge across the River North Esk requires the negotiation of a 45 degree corner when travelling West through the Village and several recent collisions demonstrate that vehicle speed on approach is critical, especially when a large bus or lorry is part of oncoming traffic.

The current 30mph limit travelling West on Melville Dykes Road is 20 yards beyond the entrance to the Village and only 5 yards before the junction with the 8704 road from Hillhead. This is clearly an anomaly. Also, at the entrance to the Village travelling East, the speed limit area is so close to a sharp 40 degree bend that many vehicles do not slow sufficiently to negotiate the corner and are forced to cross the centre line into the path of oncoming traffic at the apex.

3. The excessive speed of some traffic on the A768 and Polton Road has long been a major concern of Lasswade residents. Despite traffic calming measures on Polton Road and the road narrowings at both entrances to the Village, a significant percentage of vehicles exceed the 30mph speed limit, some of them to an alarming and dangerous extent. At peak times, heavy volumes of traffic create queues which slow down traffic, however, when traffic is lighter, there is a serious speeding problem with all sizes of vehicles (including buses) when entering the Village.

4. The above concerns have been voiced consistently over the past three years by Lasswade and District Civic Society to Midlothian Council Members and Officials, to no avail. Members of LDSCS and the residents of Lasswade have noticed that a significant amount of road safety measures, including speed reminding signs, traffic calming measures and speed restrictions have been applied widely throughout Midlothian. Conversely, strong pleas from Lasswade and surrounding district for a less dangerous and lower risk road environment, within a designated conservation area, have been neglected.

5. The considerable number of signatories appended with this plea of petition clearly demonstrates the weight of local opinion which Midlothian Council surely cannot ignore. During the signature canvassing the canvassers were astonished at the depth of feeling and frustration expressed by residents and other users about the speed and behaviour of vehicle drivers going through the Village. The signees put forward a number of alternative solutions as noted below:-

Speed Cameras for the current 30mph zone.

Speed Signs showing vehicle speed and "slow down" message.

Speed Bumps

Yellow boxes at junctions such as at the entrance at G2G3 and the Laird and Dog, where employees and customers find it impossible to enter the traffic stream every week day evening.

Better road marking at bends to ensure traffic moving in opposite directions is kept well apart.

Bridge Widening.

A Village By-pass."

The Committee then heard from Mrs Jerome and Mr E Angus in amplification of the petition. In particular, they drew attention to the fact that the petition had been signed by all households in Lasswade Village; the recent relocation of a business to Lasswade, employing 25 people had increased the traffic coming into and leaving the village; the difficulties patrons of the Laird and Dog Hotel had with access and egress had from those premises; the difficulties faced by pedestrians in crossing the road, particularly where there was no public footpath; and the fact that five other roads within the village all had junctions with the main thoroughfare led to congestion within the village due to the speed of traffic on the main thoroughfare.

The Head of Commercial Operations advised the Committee that a number of 20mph speed limits had been piloted in 2001 and had achieved only very limited success and that experience had shown that 20mph speed limits were only effective when allied to other measures such as speed bumps; chicanes; etc thus introducing "self enforcement"; speed surveys in Lasswade in 2011 and 2012 conducted over a seven day period had shown that the average speed of vehicles through the village were less than 30mph; the introduction of speed cameras was a matter controlled by the Lothian and Borders Speed Camera Partnership who determined the siting of speed cameras based on a number of qualifying criteria and that Lasswade village did not meet that criteria; and arrangements were in hand to provide "Keep Clear " road markings at the entrances to both the Laird and Dog Hotel and P2P5 premises along with changes in road markings at the approach to Lasswade Bridge and the provision of barriers at the bridge, subject to consultation with service providers. The widening of the bridge could only be achieved with significant capital expenditure.

Thereafter Mrs Jerome; Mr Angus and the Head of Commercial Operations answered questions from members.

After discussion, Councillor Russell, seconded by Councillor Baxter, moved that the petition be referred to the Director, Corporate Resources with the recommendation that a 20mph speed limit be introduced in Lasswade Village. As an amendment, Councillor Muirhead seconded by Councillor Rosie, moved that no action be taken on the petition but that officials bring forward a report on a policy and possible programme where 20mph speed limits could be introduced.

On a vote being taken, two voted for the amendment and three for the motion, which accordingly became the decision of the meeting.

(Action: Director, Corporate Resources/ Head of Commercial Operations))

5 Petition: Newtongrange Community Facilities

There was submitted report dated 17 June 2013 by the Head of Customer Services in respect of a petition submitted by Mr. Paddy Carstairs, 18 Lothian Terrace, Newtongrange, concerning the future maintenance and upkeep of community facilities in Newtongrange, i.e. Newbattle Pool; Newtongrange Library; Newtongrange Leisure Centre; and Newbattle Community Learning Centre, in the event that the Council decided, following the consultation

process on the new Newbattle High School, that these facilities should remain open. The petition was in the following terms:-

"This petition demands Midlothian Council shows its commitment to the community facilities in Newtongrange that have been considered for closure in the second stage consultation on the new Newbattle High School, namely Newbattle Swimming Pool, Newtongrange Leisure Centre, Newbattle Community Learning Centre and Newtongrange Library. In particular the Council is called on to:

- a) keep these facilities under Council ownership and management;*
- b) plan and implement a regular repair and maintenance programme that includes resolving any backlog of repairs to prolong the life of each facility.*

When the second stage consultation on the new Newbattle High School commenced, many people were alarmed and angry that the closure of eight local facilities in Gorebridge, Mayfield and Newtongrange was being proposed. The Council published information and ratings about the running costs, condition and fitness for purpose of each facility, with consideration being limited to financial cost. When this information was challenged by members of the public, it was quickly revised by Council officials, with the ratings for condition and fitness for purpose showing sudden improvement, and maintenance costs reduced.

Social and environmental costs did not feature in the consultation document, nor was there any qualitative impact assessment.

At public meetings in each village community, vociferous opposition has been expressed against the proposed closures, and thousands of signatures were gathered in petitions against the closure of each of the local facilities in Newtongrange. People want their services to stay in the village and expressed horror at the social and environmental consequences of their closure and relocation in the new school.

Since then, both the SNP and Labour parties have issued official public statements confirming that neither party will vote to close any local facility when the matter is considered at the Council meeting on 25 June. However, no assurance has been given that the local facilities will continue to receive from the Council the investment required to prolong their lives, and there is a growing fear that the Council intends to proceed with a strategy that results in the closure of our local facilities.

Scenario Four is not a legitimate option. No community group has expressed any readiness or willingness to manage our facilities. Our services must remain under Council control with proper investment and maintenance for the future."

The Committee then heard from Ms H Fleming and Mr J Ferry (who were substituting for Mr Carstairs) in amplification of the petition. In particular they stressed that there was no appetite for community ownership of the facilities amongst the residents of Newtongrange and as such the community considered that it was incumbent on the Council to retain ownership and maintain the facilities and address a backlog of repairs. They therefore sought

a commitment from the Council that financial provision to ensure the future operation of the facilities would be provided.

The Director, Education and Children's Services, advised the Committee that officials were aware of the community's views on the issues of the retention of local facilities and community ownership and these views had been incorporated into the report on the consultation on the replacement Newbattle Community High School, which was to be considered by the Council later that day. In terms of maintenance, he stressed that the budgets for this purpose had always been fully utilised. It was of course, for the Council to determine the level of any budget.

Thereafter, Ms Fleming, Mr Ferry and the Director answered questions from members.

Decision

- (a) To refer the petition to the meeting of the Council later that day as part of the Council's consideration of the Director, Education and Children's Services report on the replacement of Newbattle Community High School; and
- (b) In the event that the Council determined that the facilities referred to in the petition i.e. Newbattle Pool; Newtongrange Leisure Centre; Newtongrange Library; and Newbattle Community Learning Centre, should remain open, to refer the petition to the Head of Properties and Facilities Management, for consideration in determining the maintenance budgets for these facilities in 2014/15.

(Action: (b) Head of Properties and Facilities Management).

6 Petition: Gorebridge Leisure Centre and Library

There was submitted report, dated 17 June 2013, by the Head of Customer Services in respect of a petition containing 4327 signatures, submitted by Ms Ellen Scott, 45 New Hunterfield, Gorebridge, concerning possible closure of Gorebridge Leisure Centre and Library and the future maintenance and upkeep of these facilities in the event that the Council decides, following the consultation process on the new Newbattle High School, that these facilities should remain open. The petition was in the following terms;-

"The purpose of this petition is to make Midlothian Council aware that the residents of Gorebridge and the surrounding District Communities object to their proposals to close our Leisure Centre and Library.

We hope that Midlothian Council will listen to the residents, realise how important the facilities are to our Community and promise not to target these 2 facilities for closure again, unless it is to rebuild these facilities within the central Gorebridge Community. We would also like the Council to clear any maintenance backlog the facilities may have and we would like Midlothian Council continue to maintain them."

The Committee then heard from Ms Scott and Ms Tytler in amplification of the petition. In particular, they stressed that the Gorebridge Community did not

oppose the creation of a Community hub as part of the replacement of Newbattle Community High School but did not see the relevance of closing facilities in Gorebridge to achieve that end. They drew attention to the fact that their research showed that children in the Gorebridge locale made considerable use of both the Leisure Centre and Library and were opposed to their closure. This fact had been reinforced by a survey undertaken at Gorebridge Gala day on 22 June 2013 when over 300 children had indicated that they wished these facilities to remain open. They also referred to the extensive house building taking place in the Gorebridge area, which in their view, reinforced the need to retain these local facilities, particularly when part of Gorebridge had been designated as an area of Multiple Deprivation. On the basis that the Council would agree to retain these local facilities they also considered that it was incumbent on the Council to retain ownership and maintain the facilities and address a backlog of repairs. They therefore sought a commitment from the Council that financial provision to ensure the future operation of the facilities would be provided.

The Director, Education and Children's Services advised the Committee that the views expressed by the petitioners had influenced the recommendations being made to the Council later today in relation to Newbattle Community High School and the engagement with the community had been valuable. He also confirmed that the maintenance budgets for both the Leisure Centre and Library had always been fully utilised. It was of course, for the Council to determine the level of any budget.

Decision

- (a) To refer the petition to the meeting of the Council later that day as part of the Council's consideration of the Director, Education and Children's Services report on the replacement of Newbattle Community High School; and
- (b) In the event that the Council determined that the facilities referred to in the petition i.e. Gorebridge Leisure Centre and Gorebridge Library, should remain open, to refer the petition to the Head of Properties and Facilities Management, for consideration in determining the maintenance budgets for these facilities in 2014/15.

(Action: (b) Head of Properties and Facilities Management).

The meeting terminated at 11.25 am.