

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL SCRUTINY & PETITIONS COMMITTEE

MINUTES of Meeting of the SCRUTINY & PETITIONS COMMITTEE held in Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Newtown St. Boswells and via Microsoft Teams on Thursday, 19 October 2023 at 2.00 pm

Present:- Councillor N. Richards (Chair), M. Douglas, J. Anderson, J. Paton Day, S. Scott, F. Sinclair

Apologies:- Councillors P. Brown, J. Cox, E. Robson and E. Thornton-Nicol

In Attendance:- Chief Legal Officer, Director Infrastructure & Environment (from 2.45pm), P. Gilhooly, D. Faulds (Deputy Petitioner), Clerk to the Council, Finance Analyst (T. Hutchison) and Democratic Services Officer (L. Cuerden)

1. **CRAILING JUNCTION PETITION**

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, in particular the Deputy Petitioner, Ms Dinah Faulds. The meeting was held via Microsoft Teams and livestreamed and the Chair gave details of the protocols for the meeting.

1.2 **Petitions Procedure**

There had been circulated copies of an extract from Scrutiny and Petitions Committee procedure. The Chair outlined the process and in particular the procedure which would be followed during the meeting and the options available to members of the Committee once they had considered all the information before them.

1.3 **Crailing Junction**

There had been circulated copies of a petition entitled 'Improve Road Safety on the A698 at the Crailing Junction (D153/4) which had been signed by each of the 65 householders in the village. There had also been circulated copies of a briefing report by Philippa Gilhooly, Infrastructure and Environment which detailed progress made since the site visit on 21 September 2023. In the petition statement it was explained that residents were increasingly anxious and frightened for their lives and those of their passengers when exiting and entering the village junction due to lack of visibility and speed of vehicles on A698. It was requested that Scottish Borders Council and Police Scotland address these issues as a matter of urgency before someone was injured or killed. Several measures to improve the situation were suggested: the removal of trees from the village junction (D153/4) to the Toll House; a reduction in speed limit to 40mph with signage at each end of the village; installation of a speed camera; and a tapered slip road into the village approaching from Jedburgh and exiting the village towards Kelso.

1.4 The Chair invited Ms Faulds, Deputy Petitioner, to present the petition on behalf of the Principal Petitioner Nicola Cowe. In support of the petition statement, Ms Faulds advised that the petition had been lodged on behalf of the village of Crailing. There had been progress since the site visit of 21 September. In terms of signage, pedestrian warning signs, 'Please drive carefully' signs and SLOW road markings on the A698 had been agreed. SBC had accepted responsibility for the maintenance of the verges and embankments to the East of Crailing. SBC had also commenced the thinning of self-seeded saplings and further removal work was requested by Ms Faulds and the community to fully restore the previous sightline up to the Toll House. There had been a local agreement reached with residents for the trimming of the beech hedge to the West

of Crailing. There remained an issue related to a corner of overgrown land at Crailing Barn Road (D147/4). Ms Faulds requested that ownership and maintenance of the land be established by SBC. There had been a request for tapered splay lines and slip road on entry to and exit from the village; this had been deemed inappropriate by SBC and Police Scotland on the grounds of cost and land availability. There was also a request for a central lane to be installed to assist drivers turning right. Concern was raised about the speed of vehicles travelling through the village. The current speed limit on the A698 was 60 mph, the maximum permitted on this class of road. 2019 speed statistics had recorded an average 56 mph. The safety of children and other vulnerable pedestrians was highlighted: the suction created by passing traffic particularly lorries; a higher volume of vehicles in recent years; and electric vehicles which were harder to hear. Some children were not permitted to cross the road alone and those wishing to access the footpaths had been limited in their ability to do so due to traffic speed and volume. There were seven junctions onto the A698 and the appropriateness of a lower speed limit of 40 mph along this stretch of the road was raised. There was a request to consider deviation from the guidelines, e.g. the number of accidents or the requirement of 20 houses to front onto the road, to allow investigation into a reduction in the speed limit. Reference was made to St Boswells where a gradual speed limit reduction had been established on approach along the A68, a trunk road. Ms Faulds stressed that the community wished to mitigate the risk of injury or fatality to drivers and pedestrians using the A698.

- 1.5 The Chair thanked Ms Faulds for a comprehensive report that expressed the concerns of Crailing residents and then invited Members of the Committee to ask questions of which there were none. Sympathy was expressed for the situation experienced by the Crailing residents.
- 1.6 Philippa Gilhooly, Team Leader Road User Management presented a response to the petition. A site visit had been attended by residents, John Lamont MP, Councillor Thornton-Nicol and a Police Scotland representative. The maintenance of the verges east of Crailing had been carried out by the Council since its purchase in 1975 and had been omitted from the maintenance schedule. Ms Gilhooly confirmed that contractors were to return and that the verges were to be maintained by SBC forthwith with consideration given to biodiversity. There was to be consultation with residents as to the positioning of pedestrian warning signs. With regards to the installation of gateway signage at either end of the village, as in the case of Eckford, it was highlighted that in Eckford there were several houses that fronted on to the road, the area was more developed, and it was more obvious to drivers that they were entering a village. This was not the case with Crailing where the developed areas were set back from the A698. With regards to the reduction in the speed limit from 60 to 40 mph, it was highlighted that such a measure was not a simple undertaking. Compliance and enforcement would be required, expected compliance may lead to a false sense of security and the stretch of road was not an apparent 40mph zone for drivers. Ms Gilhooly stated that it was not uncommon for there to be signposted junctions directly onto A class roads in the Borders and there had been no history of accidents to date. The Safety Camera Partnership had been deployed 17 times in the past 12 months; one offence had been detected during 30 hours of monitoring. A signage audit had been carried out which found that signage was appropriate. With regards to St Boswells, it was confirmed that the speed limit reduction was in place to act as a buffer zone into the more built-up area of the town and the regulations differed for trunk roads.
- 1.7 In response to Members' questions. Ms Gilhooly confirmed that visibility had been improved with the removal of some trees and saplings, with more to be done soon, therefore the addition of a slip road was deemed unnecessary on the A698. The deployment of a safety camera was viewed as a deterrent and was evidenced by the low number of offences. Their deployment was tightly controlled and legislated. In addition, Police Scotland patrol vehicles had been positioned at other sites along the stretch of road. With regards to the general speed of vehicles on the A698, and specifically to trucks which posed a risk to pedestrians when passing at speed, Ms Gilhooly highlighted that

truck drivers were not permitted to travel at 60mph. Ms Gilhooly was unable to find any UK cases of pedestrians injured due to any 'suction' effect. With regards to the use of double or solid white lines to deter overtaking at Crailing junction, such a measure would require to be introduced along the entire length of the A698, and as such was not appropriate. The addition of the red texture flecks at the location was an additional measure already taken by SBC. In response to a question about a larger sign to alert drivers to the village, Ms Gilhooly reported that the size of and location of signage was dictated by 3 factors: 85th percentile vehicle speeds; average vehicle speeds; and daily flow of vehicles. Ms Gilhooly confirmed that vehicle speed data referenced in her response to the petition was from the period April 2022 – March 2023. This data was sampled from in-car telemetry obtained via sat-nav systems; this data was purchased by companies such as Agilysis to aggregate and sample data. Agilysis had also been used by SBC for a validation and verification testing exercise of vehicle speed data at 125 sites repeatedly surveyed during the 20mph initiative. Results for this had been accurate and SBC were satisfied with the validity of data obtained from the Agilysis 'Speed Compliance Tool'. Accident data obtained from Crashmap Pro was dated from January 2021 to December 2021 and Police Scotland confirmed there had been no incidents reported. Ms Faulds reported an incident in the village in the days before the site visit which had been described by Police Scotland as down to driver error. Crashmap area maps of the Crailing area were shared with Members and illustrated the number of Police Scotland reported injury accidents between 2017 and 2021, which was zero. Average speed data at various sections of the A698 by Crailing, all below 60mph, was also shared with Members. In response to a question about any other measures that could be taken, Ms Gilhooly reported that local authorities nationally were looking for a solution to inappropriate driver behaviour, which was difficult to influence. Intelligent Speed Assist was to be fitted by vehicle manufacturers to all new cars July 2023; cameras and sensors would enable a reduction of power to the engine to limit vehicle speed and ensure speed limit compliance. The impact of this technology was anticipated to reduce vehicle speeds overall.

- 1.8 Ms Faulds then commented on several aspects of the response: there was a plea to reduce the speed limit as it was not obvious to drivers that they were driving through a village; the lack of sightlines at Crailing junction for a Police Scotland vehicle to legally and safely monitor the A698 illustrated the difficulty faced by Crailing residents on a daily basis; and the contention that compliance would be too hard to police was not a credible argument. Villager would continue to be fearful of crossing the A698 on foot or in a vehicle without speed reduction measures.
- 1.9 The Chair then asked each Member to share their opinions and then the Committee considered their next steps. The mitigations taken by SBC to date were acknowledged and an ongoing commitment to review the situation in light of new technologies and capabilities was given. The Committee generally agreed, given the data and reasons provided, that it was not possible to reduce the speed limit on the A698 at Crailing Junction.

DECISION

AGREED that the issue raised did not merit or did not require further action, other than those measures already undertaken.

ADJOURNMENT

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 3.05 p.m. and the meeting reconvened at 3.10 p.m.

2. MINUTE

Copies of the Minute of Meeting held on 17 August 2023 had been circulated.

DECISION

APPROVED the Minute for signature by the Chair.

3. INDUSTRIAL ESTATES IN THE SCOTTISH BORDERS

- 3.1 The Director Infrastructure and Environment gave a short presentation, the purpose of which was to provide Members with an overview of Industrial Estates in the Scottish Borders. A report was due to be presented to Council later in 2023. The Scottish Borders covered an area of 4,724 km² and comprised 97 settlements and a population of approximately 115,000. A summary map of all sites where SBC currently owned Economic Development sites/ Business Land was provided – 13 in total across Berwickshire, Eildon, Teviot & Liddesdale and Cheviot localities. A summary map of Local Development Plan (LDP) sites was provided – 9 across all five localities. An officer working group had been established which met monthly to progress Economic Development sites and with a view to the development of a plan of action for the sites. The group comprised Estates, Economic Development, Planning and Capital Programme Management. A market assessment had been completed in collaboration with SOSE and partners and a summary was provided in relation to supply and demand of office space, small industrial units and serviced land/sites and barriers which included access to development finance and investment capital among others. Several recommendations were detailed in the assessment: coordination of market demand/supply information; identification of areas of market potential by public bodies; interventions to make land serviced and developable; public sector funded development; and market intervention to ensure local demand and attraction of mobile projects.
- 3.2 Information was shared on the Net Zero Starts Here Investment Guide; an initiative launched on 30 August 2023 by a South of Scotland multi-agency partnership which focussed on building the economy of the future around a renewable, values-based economy and the region's natural capital. The website had been launched and detailed guidance in several sectors: energy transition; digital business services; digital financial services; food and drink innovation; health & technology; and software & IT.
- 3.3 In relation to SBC's Site Analysis and Prioritisation, five criteria had been developed and were as follows: Strategic Fit; Market Assessment; Transport & Access; Economic Input; and Development Potential. The working group assessment had identified several key priority sites: Duns Industrial Estate; three Eyemouth Gunsgreenhill sites; Galapark and Burnfoot, Hawick; St Mary's Mill, Selkirk; Tweedbank; and Tweeddale. A summary of action to date on other sites in the region was provided in terms of the number of plots available now and those in need of funding or development, the number of active enquiries and plots let or sold.
- 3.4 In response to a question about the Jedburgh Oxnam Industrial Estate, it was confirmed that electrical works on site was still required but funding was needed. The demand in the area was low and consequently, development had been delayed. A Strategic Working Group had been established to liaise with Scottish Water, Scottish Gas, BT and Scottish Power to achieve better alignment of priorities and subsequent investment. In relation to the lack of SBC owned sites in the Tweeddale LDP available, it was confirmed that there were two land holdings of interest for which SBC Estates and Economic Development teams were in discussion with landowners. In addition, early discussions had taken place with an Innerleithen landowner around the prospect of repurposing some of their holdings. There was a need for there to be a closer alignment between land allocation in the LDP and business needs and demand. In response to a question about Reston sites, it was confirmed that land in Reston had been allocated and was part of the consultation of the new LDP. It was acknowledged that more work was required to effectively promote the availability of SBC owned sites and target advertising to particular business sectors.

DECISION

NOTED the presentation.

4. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next scheduled meeting of the Scrutiny & Petitions Committee was due to be held on 7 December 2023 at 10 am.

The meeting concluded at 3.35 pm