

Cllr. Peter McBride and Liz Twitchett Meeting – 14 September 2018

A summary of events

Cllr. McBride sits on the Transport Committee for West Yorkshire and also the Investment Committee – which makes all the decisions and looks at all of Kirklees... and the rest of West Yorkshire. The key route network for the whole of West Yorkshire is 5,000 miles of roads and money is spent based on the importance of one project against another.

Cllr. McBride takes the position that money spent on larger projects, such as £70m for improvements at Cooper Bridge, produces a better return for the money required. He further believes that a bypass for Flockton would pass the traffic problems down the line to Dalton and Kirkheaton (Cllr. McBride's Wards). He said:

"You will not get a bypass. I can absolutely assure you. Not because we are just bloody-minded – I know we wouldn't get the money!"

Whilst Cllr. McBride was evidently stating Kirklees policy, the bypass group is determined to look further afield and to maintain pressure.

Cllr. McBride suggested that we would be better looking at a localised solution to resolve the problem within the limits of Council resources. He added that how, where, and when, would be determined by Liz Twitchett and her colleagues.

Liz Twitchett said that all of the current traffic calming had been achieved with the resources they had available, in an attempt to alleviate some of the problems. Liz travels through Flockton regularly and is fully aware of the problems. She said that Flockton village, through residential expansion, had become a victim of its own success – and was why prestigious housing developers wanted to come to Flockton.

She said:

"We are struggling to identify within the boundaries of the highway that we've got available, what we can do."

She also added that the aspirations of both businesses and residents had to be considered in line with the 'A' classification of the road.

A resident's question on funding clarified that there isn't a specific 'pot of money', but very occasionally you might get money for 'pinch points' which resolve problems – without creating more.

An example of this was given as Waterloo, the biggest congestion point outside of Cooper Bridge, where congestion had led to a proposal for road changes that was later withdrawn, when engineers re-timed traffic lights which solved the problem without major expense.

Liz then alluded to our mention of a meeting with the Transport Secretary, Chris Grayling and seemed to think that he perhaps hadn't been clear enough about criteria added on for the money available. [This refers to the Government's declaration that money would be made available to help small towns and villages pay for bypasses]. "Their intention is one thing, but the criteria they attach to those intentions, don't always marry up." she said.

Furthermore, any money would go to the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, then chief executives and political leads would make decisions around how the money was going to be spent, based on an outline business case and feasibility study. Of course, there is always competition for funding from many other schemes across West Yorkshire.

Liz talked about 'casualty reduction' and the difference between 'accidents' versus 'accident issues'. Her department have looked at extra signage, road markings at pinch points, and the 20mph proposals from consultation.

Policing the 7.5T weight restriction

Liz also mentioned the TRO (Traffic Regulation Order), as applied to the weight limit signs entering Flockton from Grange Moor. Originally produced in 1971, using the language of the time, it was written very differently to contemporary 'modern' documents. The Police had complained that this made it unenforceable. As it turns out, this wasn't the case, but to tighten up on the order, it was reworded in a contemporary way at a cost to Kirklees Council of £5,500.

It had previously been thought that Trading Standards could enforce the access restriction, but apparently they cannot enforce 'moving traffic offences' – at least not it seems, in Kirklees. Only the Police can do this. However, the Police would have to follow a vehicle all the way through Flockton, and out the other side, to make sure a vehicle did not stop to make a delivery or collect something. They could only then pull it over, if no business was done in Flockton.

The traffic count

Information, based on the recent traffic count, could help Police to select the best times to monitor traffic peaks and troughs, with particular interest in HGV traffic. (Currently, Flockton residents have been informed that they have to pay for the detailed results of the survey, but it's likely that Liz Twitchett will have access to them already and could pass the relevant information on).

Enforcing a new speed limit

Apparently, a 20mph speed limit cannot be enforced, unless the normal speed of traffic is already around that speed. Higher normal speeds make this unenforceable. (It is possible that 20mph signs might at least encourage drivers to keep speeds down to 30mph).

Pavement parking obstructions

Liz Twitchett said that they were watching closely, the issue of pavement parking to see where the main problems regularly occurred.

Speed cameras are not an option

Average speed cameras are becoming used more on 'A' roads and the cost is coming down, but it would be difficult to implement when there are various exit and entry points to the village, along its through route [although one might think that enough of the main offenders would be going straight through].

In 2010 the Government took away funding for speed cameras and handed the responsibility to partnerships, which took on the criteria that the Government used to use. There would also have to be justification for average speed cameras versus fixed speed cameras. Apparently, it all comes down to 'casualty reduction'. Without justification for casualty reduction, then speed cameras are seen only as revenue collection. The meeting was told that apparently, Flockton has a relatively good 'collision record' and therefore would not justify the use of speed cameras.

Pavement safety barriers

Liz Twitchett insisted that a safety fence wouldn't stop a car, but when it was suggested that it might reduce the damage to a pedestrian, she added that it was more likely to fall over and harm a pedestrian and "there's nowhere to go". [However, in some places along the pavement route, high walls also result in "nowhere to go"!]]

Declassifying the 'A' road

Liz more or less conceded that the road through Flockton is unsuitable for the type of traffic it is carrying, but insisted that declassifying the road wouldn't now stop the traffic. [But one could suggest it might permit the installation of speed bumps if it was downgraded to a 'B' road.]

Liz said there was no option to widen the road, but was asked by some residents why developers at the end of the village weren't made to widen the road in that area? Cllr. McBride responded that it was asked for, but Traffic Planning weren't interested in making that request. Apparently, planners have to weigh up cost benefits. A developer looks at the situation, but could just pull out and build on an easier site. If boundaries are pushed too far, developers might move from Kirklees.

After development planners look at what's sustainable and what's viable, the Highways engineers then look at the plans. Cllr. McBride insisted that Kirklees was one of the toughest dealers and Liz supported this view.

So it seems acknowledged that Flockton has a traffic problem, but to solve it, may move the problem elsewhere. Perhaps we can use joined up thinking to benefit Flockton, Kirkheaton, etc.?

Cllr McBride said that in the longer term, they are looking at strategic needs which will benefit the whole of Kirklees. Liz said that in the short term, priority is to get the traffic order right and the signs for HGVs. They were not intending to remove the 'No access to M1 through Flockton' sign but, after this meeting, saw that it may hinder rather than help – so will take the [M1] signs off.

It was mentioned that a number of HGVs are driven by foreign drivers who cannot always read written signs. The sign will probably show 7.5T weight limit, with the writing, 'access only'. Some wondered if 'local access only' might be better. Liz said she would check with the Police to help decide on the best writing for signs.

Possible new digital technology signs

Liz Twitchett said that they were currently looking at the use of signs that show what a vehicle's weight is, based on its registration plate. If a vehicle were to approach one of these signs, it would flash up the registration and indicate that the vehicle could not turn in a particular direction, i.e. from the Grange Moor roundabout, towards Flockton. [I wonder if the system could recognise foreign plates?] Liz said she would keep the Flockton Bypass Group informed with progress. Cllr. Bill Armer, also present at the meeting, pointed out that sunlight can sometimes prevent the digital signs from being seen.

A question was asked about how a Flockton bypass or link road, would be moving the problem to someone else? It was then admitted that Flockton was actually being used as a traffic calmer. If traffic reaches other areas faster, new pinch points may result.

Cllr. McBride mentioned the use of school 'crocodile walking', but was quickly told that the existing pavements were not wide enough. However, it did raise the question of back ways that might be used or developed, together with parking away from school. It also raised the issue of the removal of a crossing patrol.

Crossing patrols

Liz said that the Government had changed road patrol guidelines and the last patrols in Kirklees had been lost through natural retirement and not replaced. Local authorities had been asked to take patrols off. It was also mentioned [quite seriously] that children [and we could add, a few adults] should be taught how to use zebra crossings – including the importance of making eye contact with drivers, thereby creating an agreement between driver and pedestrian.

A local plan

Cllr. McBride said that the best way forward would be to adopt a local plan – a neighbourhood plan that Kirklees could interact with. Liz added that if Flockton had a neighbourhood plan, it could sit alongside the local plan. Cllr. Bill Armer felt that the local plan was more about houses, but Cllr McBride and Liz Twitchett insisted this wasn't the case. Liz said that the local plan was aspirational. Cllr. McBride said that Kirkheaton were already developing a neighbourhood plan.

The meeting ended at approximately 11:30 am and all parties agreed that it had been helpful to share opinions without unnecessary and distracting rants. This meeting also paves the way for future meetings.