

THE AVENUE, LINTHORPE: PROPOSED ZEBRA CROSSING

Results of Public Consultation Exercise: Report to Executive Member for Regeneration

1. Purpose of Report

Middlesbrough Council is proposing to introduce a new zebra crossing on The Avenue in Linthorpe. This Report sets out the rationale behind the proposed scheme, details the results of the public consultation exercise carried out in October and November 2020 and makes recommendations as to whether the scheme should be taken forward to the implementation stage.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- a) The responses received during the public consultation exercise are noted;
- b) The objections to the proposed scheme are overruled; and
- c) The scheme proceeds to the implementation stage.

3. Background

The Avenue is a district distributor road serving the residential area of Linthorpe, to the south of Middlesbrough town centre. As well as carrying local traffic it is also a busy bus route, with the section of The Avenue to the south of its junction with Eastbourne Road served by up to 22 buses an hour.

St. Edward's RC Primary School is located on Eastbourne Road, a short distance to the east of its junction with The Avenue. Because of its location within a densely populated residential area, many of the children travel to and from the school on foot. As there are pedestrian entrances to the school on Eastbourne Road and The Avenue, School Crossing Patrol Officers operate on both roads in the morning and the afternoon during term time in order to assist children and parents to cross safely.

The existing crossing point on The Avenue is located approximately 20 metres to the south of its junction with Cornfield Road. This is an uncontrolled facility, so pedestrians do not have priority over vehicles when crossing the road unless the School Crossing Patrol Officer is on duty.

Despite the presence of the School Crossing Patrol Officers at school start and finish times, concerns have been raised by local residents, parents, Ward Councillors and the school itself regarding pedestrian safety on both The Avenue and Eastbourne Road. The Council received a petition in June 2019 asking for zebra crossings to be introduced on both roads and, following an approach from the school at around the same time, Council officers worked in partnership with Ward Councillors, the Neighbourhood Policing Team and representatives of the school to develop a package of measures designed to reduce

vehicle speeds on both roads and create a safer environment for pedestrians. This package of measures included the introduction of a 20 mph speed limit on The Avenue and Eastbourne Road and waiting restrictions at the junction of the two roads, together with improvements to the existing signing and road markings on all three approaches to the school.

Councillor Theo Furness, one of the Members representing the Park Ward, submitted a bid to the Members' Small Scheme Allocation in January 2020 for the introduction of a zebra crossing at the existing uncontrolled pedestrian crossing point on The Avenue. Following a Covid-related delay to the decision making process, this bid was approved by Executive on 27th October 2020.

More recently, the School Crossing Patrol Officer who operates on The Avenue was struck by a car whilst on duty on the morning of Wednesday 30th September 2020, sustaining serious injuries as a result. This collision was caused by a loss of control of the vehicle by its elderly driver, and was not linked in any way to the presence or otherwise of a controlled crossing facility. Nevertheless, and given the previous concerns regarding road safety in the vicinity of the school, the incident generated considerable interest, both from local stakeholders and on social media channels.

4. Proposed Scheme

The proposed scheme is illustrated in the plan attached at **Appendix 1** to this Report.

The scheme comprises the introduction of a zebra crossing located adjacent to no. 49 The Avenue, which is where the existing School Crossing Patrol operates. The crossing beacons will be screened from the side to ensure that the occupiers of nearby properties are not disturbed during the hours of darkness.

The existing footway on the west side of The Avenue will be extended into the carriageway by around 2 metres at and on the approaches to the new crossing. This will both allow pedestrians to see clearly in both directions when using the crossing and ensure that drivers can see pedestrians waiting to cross, whilst also allowing most of the existing on-street parking on the west side of The Avenue to be retained. This parking arrangement will be formalised by the introduction of a marked bay from the crossing southwards to a point opposite Sycamore Road.

The introduction of the footway build out and the parking bay will reduce the width of the 'through' carriageway on the section of The Avenue between Cornfield Road and Sycamore Road to approximately 6 metres. This reduction in width will allow larger vehicles such as buses to pass each other safely whilst, at the same time, encouraging drivers to approach the crossing at an appropriate speed.

The proposed scheme will be funded on a 50:50 basis by the Members' Small Scheme Allocation (following Councillor Furness' successful bid) and the Council's Annual Local Transport Capital Programme. The preliminary estimate for the cost of the scheme is £30,000.

It is important to note that the proposed scheme both complements and enhances the package of road safety improvements developed with local stakeholders in 2019. A plan illustrating the full package of measures – including the proposed crossing – is attached at **Appendix 2** to this Report. The waiting restrictions at and in the vicinity of the junction

of The Avenue and Eastbourne Road came into operation on 18th February 2021, and the proposed 20 mph speed limit on both roads is due to be formally advertised in March 2021 as part of a Traffic Regulation Order covering a number of speed limit changes on roads across the Borough. The improvements to the existing signing and road markings are also being progressed, and are due to be implemented later this year.

5. Public Consultation Exercise

As with all proposed highway improvement schemes, an informal public consultation exercise has been undertaken in order to seek the views of key stakeholders. This exercise was carried out in October and November 2020, and sought the views of the following parties:

- The occupiers of properties in the vicinity of the proposed crossing;
- Local Ward Councillors;
- St. Edward's RC Primary School;
- The bus operators (Arriva and Stagecoach);
- Connect Tees Valley;
- Cleveland Police;
- Cleveland Fire Brigade; and
- The North East Ambulance Service (NEAS).

Anyone not included in the above list but with an interest in the scheme was also able to submit their comments via the Council website.

A total of 16 responses were received, nine of which were from the occupiers of properties in the vicinity of the proposed crossing, three from the other key stakeholders listed above and four from other parties with an interest in the scheme. Of this total, nine of the responses were in favour of the scheme and four were against, with the other responses not indicating a preference one way or the other. All four of the objections were received from the occupiers of properties in the vicinity of the proposed crossing.

The main grounds for objection to the proposed scheme were as follows:

- a) The impact of the proposed footway build out on access to adjacent properties;
- b) The consequent reduction in the number of on-street parking spaces;
- c) The impact of the proposed crossing on local air quality due to vehicles stopping and starting;
- d) The safety implications of the crossing due to its proposed location close to the junctions with Eastbourne Road and Cornfield Road;
- e) Traffic Signals should be introduced at the junction of The Avenue and Eastbourne Road instead;
- f) The lack of justification for a zebra crossing based on the recent casualty record on The Avenue;
- g) The creation of designated parking bay on the west side of The Avenue, which will make reversing manoeuvres from the driveways of adjacent properties more dangerous; and
- h) The design of the scheme, which is not in keeping with a designated Conservation Area.

Each of these points is considered in more detail below:

a) Impact of the Footway Build Out on Access to Adjacent Properties

The proposed footway build out is approximately 20 metres long and 2 metres wide. As highlighted in Section 4 above, the build out will ensure that drivers and pedestrians can see each other, whilst the consequent narrowing of the carriageway to around 6 metres will act to reduce vehicle speeds on The Avenue. The presence of the build out will, therefore, reduce the potential for vehicle/pedestrian collisions to occur at the crossing point.

Although the build out will have a minor impact on access to the properties located directly adjacent to it, this needs to be balanced against the significant road safety benefits that it will deliver, particularly as far as the users of the crossing are concerned. The build out will also minimise the number off-street parking spaces lost as part of the scheme.

b) Reduction in the number of On-Street Parking Spaces

The introduction of the crossing will result in the loss of three on-street parking spaces compared to the current road layout. This figure is based on the assumption that drivers currently comply with Rule 243 of the Highway Code, and do not park within 10 metres of the junction with Cornfield Road. This loss of spaces is not considered significant given the ready availability of on-street parking spaces on nearby roads and the fact that all of the properties in the direct vicinity of the crossing have in-curtilage parking facilities.

c) Impact of the Crossing on Local Air Quality

Based on current patterns of use, the demand for the crossing is likely to be highest at school start and finish times. As highlighted in Section 3 above, the School Crossing Patrol Officer currently operates at these times, so the frequency of vehicles stopping and starting is unlikely to change due to the introduction of the crossing.

Pedestrian demand at other times of the day is likely to be significantly lower, so the number of vehicles stopping and starting will also be low. Consequently, the impact of the crossing on local air quality is unlikely to be significant. Again, any minor disbenefits in terms of air quality need to be balanced against the significant benefits that the crossing will deliver in terms of reducing the potential for vehicle/pedestrian collisions to occur.

d) Location of the Crossing close to the junctions with Eastbourne Road and Cornfield Road

Because of the 'bell mouth' layout of the junction of Eastbourne Road and The Avenue, drivers turning left from Eastbourne Road to The Avenue often do so without stopping and, in some cases, without slowing down significantly. This means that the crossing needs to be sited far enough away from the junction to allow drivers to see it and stop safely if a pedestrian is about to cross.

Rule 126 of the Highway Code states that the typical stopping distance for a car travelling at 30 mph in dry weather conditions is 23 metres. As the proposed crossing will be located approximately 50 metres away from the junction, the potential for

vehicle/pedestrian collisions to occur as a result of left turning manoeuvres is very low.

The alignment of the junction of The Avenue and Cornfield Road is much tighter, which means that drivers turning right onto The Avenue have to slow right down or stop before doing so. This means that drivers making this manoeuvre will have ample opportunity to stop safely should a pedestrian be waiting to cross.

e) Introduction of Traffic Signals at the junction of The Avenue and Eastbourne Road

The introduction of traffic signal control at the junction of The Avenue and Eastbourne Road was proposed some years ago as part of the Tees Valley Bus Network Improvements major scheme. The main reason behind this proposal was to reduce delays to bus services at busy times of the day, as both The Avenue and Eastbourne Road are high frequency bus routes. However, the decision was subsequently made to drop this proposal following traffic surveys that showed that the delays to buses at such times were minimal.

Whilst it would be possible to introduce traffic signals incorporating pedestrian crossing facilities at the junction (albeit not within the available budget), the main pedestrian desire line is at the existing crossing point. For this reason, the proposed scheme represents the most effective means of reducing the potential for vehicle/pedestrian collisions to occur and, by doing so, addressing the local concerns around pedestrian safety.

f) Lack of Justification for the Zebra Crossing

There has been one recorded collision involving personal injury at the existing crossing point in the last five years. This was the collision involving the School Crossing Patrol Officer that occurred in September 2020, as detailed in Section 3 above.

Whilst the recent casualty record on The Avenue is generally good, the combination of the volume of traffic that it carries and the high level of pedestrian activity means that the potential for vehicle/pedestrian collisions to occur is high – hence the local concerns around pedestrian safety referred to in Section 3 above. The proposed scheme will reduce the potential for collisions, thereby addressing these concerns.

g) Impact of Designated Parking Bay on Reversing Manoeuvres from the Driveways of Adjacent Properties

Parking already takes place on the west side of The Avenue, so the creation of a designated parking bay will merely formalise the existing situation. Consequently turning manoeuvres into and out of the driveways of the adjacent properties should be no more hazardous if the scheme is introduced than they are at present.

h) The Design of the Scheme, and its Compatibility with the Designated Conservation Area

Whilst it is impossible to make a zebra crossing blend in fully with its surroundings – it needs to be conspicuous to be seen by drivers – the proposed scheme has been designed to be as sympathetic as possible to the existing streetscape within the

constraints imposed by the regulations governing the design of zebra crossings, with the materials used for the footway build out consistent with those used when the carriageway and the footways on The Avenue were reconstructed around ten years ago. It is, therefore, considered that the design of the crossing will meet the requirements of the Council in its role as Highway Authority whilst at the same time being compatible with its obligations as the Planning Authority.

As well as the above objections, a number of comments were received both from those in favour of the scheme and those against it regarding the need for additional waiting restrictions at the junctions of The Avenue with Eastbourne Road and Cornfield Road. As highlighted in Section 4 above, such restrictions have recently been introduced.

Comments were also received regarding the potential for driveways adjacent to the proposed designated parking bay to be blocked by parked vehicles. It is, therefore, proposed to introduce advisory 'keep clear' markings as part of the scheme in to encourage drivers to park considerately.

Three of the consultees – all of whom were in favour of the proposed crossing – asked whether it would be possible to introduce waiting restrictions on the east side of The Avenue (i.e. opposite the designated parking bay) to minimise the risk of through traffic being obstructed by parked vehicles. Whilst it is not proposed to introduce waiting restrictions as part of the scheme, the operation of this section of The Avenue will be monitored should the crossing be implemented and, if necessary, the need for such restrictions will be reviewed.

Finally, the speed of vehicles on The Avenue was highlighted as an issue by many of the consultees, whether they were in favour of the proposed scheme or against it. As mentioned in Section 4 above, it is proposed to reduce the speed limit on both The Avenue and Eastbourne Road from 30 mph to 20 mph, with the associated Traffic Regulation Order due to be advertised during March 2021. If approved, the combination of the proposed crossing (including the associated reduction in the width of the through carriageway) and the 20 mph speed limit will act to reduce the speed of vehicles travelling on The Avenue, thereby reducing the potential for collisions and improving the quality of life of local residents.

6. Summary and Conclusions

The public consultation exercise carried out in October and November 2020 generated a total of 16 responses, with nine of the 13 consultees (or just over 69%) who expressed a preference indicating their support for the proposed scheme.

Although four objections were received, none of the grounds on which those objections were made are considered to be sufficient to justify either the rejection of the proposed scheme or any significant alterations to its design. It is, therefore, recommended that the objections received are overruled, and that the scheme proceeds to the implementation stage.