

MINUTES FROM WALSOKEN PARISH COUNCIL
PUBLIC MEETING RE A47/BROADEND ROAD JUNCTION
WALSOKEN VILLAGE HALL, 7pm
FRIDAY 24TH JANUARY 2014

Present

Walsoken Parish Council – Cllrs Leach (Chair), John Woolley (Vice Chair), Landall, Houghton, Snow, Smith and Wiffen.

County Cllr. Harry Humphrey, Borough Cllr. Brian Long, Borough Cllr Roy Groom was unable to attend due to illness.

Representatives from Fenland District Council (including Cllrs. Virginia and Mike Bucknor and Cllr. Simon King), Wisbech Town Council, Marshland St James Parish Council, Emneth Parish Council.

Elizabeth Truss MP with her aide Fiona Walker, Catherine Brookes – Regional Director of Highways Agency, John Elworthy – Editor of Wisbech Standard and Bridget Wall (campaigner for roundabout). Local press.

Approximately 65 members of the public.

Welcome and introductions

Chair welcomed everyone and introduced himself, Vice Chair John Woolley, Clerk and Speakers.

He thanked Bridget Wall for raising awareness of the junction.

He stated the purpose of the meeting was to establish whether there was sufficient support to form an independent Action Group to further improvements at the A47/Broadend Road junction.

He gave some background information regarding the actions taken by the Parish Council since 2007 to try to improve safety at the junction.

He particularly thanked Cllrs Houghton and Landall for their focus and drive on this safety issue.

He then asked the three Speakers if they would like to say a few words.

Elizabeth Truss MP

Elizabeth stated that there had been under investment on infrastructure. The Prime Minister had visited Norfolk in the last week and had made a commitment to look at the whole of the A47.

Stephen Hammond had driven along a whole stretch of the A47 and noted the junction.

She stressed a long term solution was needed with a full plan of a dual road and proper junctions.

She wanted to hear the opinions of the local residents, urging them to become involved in an Action Group and giving feedback to the Government's Feasibility Study.

She also urged the Highways Agency to complete this work.

John Elworthy, Editor of Wisbech Standard

John stated he had knowledge of handling various road safety campaigns in Cambridgeshire and the media could be used to make Authorities take notice. He felt traffic lights may be less costly. He also felt that road safety was a matter of little battles won one at a time.

Catherine Brookes, Regional Director of Highways Agency

Catherine thanked the Parish Council for their invite. She explained that she had only been in her post since September 2013 but had looked at past accident statistics and options together with current plans.

She reported that the Highways Agency had been unable to get a work programme through since 2009 but this year, proposals had been placed on a priority list, and she felt very pleased that finally something would be done as there is now more money available. She reported that the Government had promised to triple the annual spending money by 2021.

She stated that the short term solutions will be delivered and finished by the end of this calendar year. This will involve installation of vehicle activated signs eastbound and westbound flashing “Reduce Speed Now” which will be triggered when a vehicle is waiting to turn out of a side road or in the central area, as turning right seems to be a priority. There will also be no overtaking markings which will be white lines through a ghost island.

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The whole of the A47 is under a Feasibility Study and is considered a priority. There is to be a meeting on 30th January which aims to agree the scope of studies, not details, but looking into how the Highways Agency can prioritise, it will be evidence based.

She commented that she is very keen to engage with locals and groups to look at options and make sure money is spent in the right areas.

In the medium term she has asked a team to look into the feasibility of a roundabout and look into the criteria that ruled it out in the past.

Public Questions/comments

Chair stated that it was refreshing to hear that improvements will go ahead this year. He opened the floor to the public for their comments and questions.

The following questions and comments were made -

1. Resident travelling from Kings Lynn was waiting to turn right and almost had a head-on collision. Wants to get rid of a third lane.
2. Financial and emotional costs involved when someone is killed. Ministry of Transport put financial cost at £1.8M but no figure on the pain. Correct costing figures needed for work.
3. When will the work be done this year? We need to stop traffic turning right and make them travel down to the roundabout.
4. We don't want a roundabout.
5. There have been 6 or 7 fatalities on 1.5 miles of road. The problems are the sharp curve in the road and lorries hugging the side of the road causing cars to overtake without seeing the junction. Must slow traffic down and stop overtaking.
6. Used the junction to turn right for 15 years and seen many scenarios. Need to change driver behaviour, white lines will make no difference. Drivers are in a hurry and do not want to wait at the junctions. If 500 houses are going to be built it should be a condition that the roundabout is built before the houses. There is nothing categoric in the Local Development Plan.
7. Have sometimes indicated right to stop car behind from overtaking, and then turned left.
8. Why aren't the Police getting involved as they have accident statistics? What about pedestrian bridges as an option?
9. 44 ton lorries are very dangerous to manoeuvre over the junction, especially school buses as they are slow. A roundabout would filter traffic through. Doesn't want a ban on turning right or traffic lights.
10. Short term measures needed but will this delay the long term solutions making the short term solutions a waste of money? Do signs work to slow traffic down? We need guidance on which is best either traffic lights or a roundabout.
11. Will any money from the developer building the 500 houses go directly into a safety scheme?
12. Can improvements go ahead without money from the developer?
13. Has suggested in the past that hedgerows be cut back to improve vision.

The following **responses** were given -

1. **Cllr Long** – had recently stood at the junction and realised that cars are travelling at 60+mph. The junction takes longer to cross because it is staggered. Improvements are desperately needed to reduce speed and protect cars crossing safely. Vehicle activated signs will not stop people overtaking. The original plans stated barriers in the middle of the road but this was dropped as there was a dispute over land. Houses will not necessarily be delivered until the developer thinks the time is right.
2. **Highways Agency** – We will target resources where we can see the most deaths, as we can now afford the work, we will look at the best solutions.
3. **Cllr Humphrey** – had originally suggested physical barriers to stop overtaking, as per the

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A17, but been told the road was not wide enough, and then suggested double white lines but been told these were not practical. Something needs doing now. He is happy to Chair the new Action Group. The A47 serves the Midlands to the coast and could be used to support the A14. Accidents are also happening away from the junction. He fears that developers will land bank knowing that the A47 is going to be dualled so that Highways Agency will already have done the work.

4. **Highways Agency** – white lines are now going ahead. We have looked at accidents within a radius of 1km of the junction.
5. **Elizabeth Truss** – A47 is being prioritised and the A47 Alliance, local councils and MPs have highlighted problems. This is an opportunity for Walsoken to get safety measures. Asked the Highways Agency what information the Borough Council and local residents can provide as evidence?
6. **Highways Agency** – evidence will be targeted at criteria, which are not available at the moment. Housing numbers are often quoted but don't always come to fruition. If all the houses quoted are built then an upgrade will be needed. Potential options will be looked at such as pedestrian crossing points. Short term solutions will not delay long term solutions. She is keen to engage with the Action Group and can advise whether or not suggested solutions will work. There is a complex contract for developers to enter into and work would be a partnership between Highways Agency and the Council. If a road needs upgrading the Public Purse will fund any work
7. **John Elworthy** – this is the second public meeting in several years, and the number of deaths should be taken as evidence instead of meeting criteria. Local people would be happy to pay tax money if they knew it went to fund local safety. This needs to be based on human rationale rather than criteria. Developer paid for traffic lights in March. Guidelines are set for improvements but can exceptions be made and is there scope for locals to make a case?
8. **Highways Agency** – the criteria will be in the A47 Feasibility Study for the whole of the A47, which will be a formal process. Any case will be heard and the local voice will be taken into consideration. By April 2015 the Highways Agency will not be tied to Government but will be a company and have a greater level of flexibility.
9. **Cllr Virginia Bucknor** – Cambs and Norfolk MPs need to work closely together and hopes locals from Wisbech and Norfolk will support the campaign. Has campaigned for 2 years with only 5 people for improvements on A1101. Something needs doing quickly and long term. The local economy is dependant on improving the A47.
10. **Elizabeth Truss** – works closely with Stephen Barclay and will ensure co-ordination.
11. **Cllr Andy Houghton** – the original purpose of the meeting was to gauge support and he noted there are differences of opinion. Asked if Highways Agency could give their opinion?
12. **Highways Agency** – no, can't give a decision tonight as there are many things to consider and some solutions have a knock-on effect, we need to understand drivers' behaviour.
13. **Cllr Mike Bucknor** – sees 2 problems – the A47 urgently needs dualing but not at the expense of getting other improvements completed and signs could lead to information overload. Thinks no right turning is sensible. People need to get involved.
14. **Elizabeth Truss** – summarised by saying that there was a very strong message that short term measures are supported but long term measures are also needed. She was grateful that Highways Agency are now engaging. She will support a campaign group and work with Cambridgeshire MPs and colleagues. She will give support through the Press, Government meetings and local meetings. She left the meeting at 8.15pm.
15. **Cllr Fred Leach** – the Police had been invited but been unable to attend.
16. **Cllr Simon King** – it is possible to get infrastructure in place before development takes place. There was a firm commitment that trees would be cut back on the Highways verge.
17. **Highways Agency** – we can't pre-empt the results of the Feasibility Study. I will make a note about visibility splays and the cutting back of trees. in line with set criteria. *Cont.....*

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Chair's summary

Chair thanked everyone for attending. He thanked Cllrs Andy Houghton and Allan Landall and Bridget Wall who will all co-ordinate information. He thanked Elizabeth, Catherine and John for their advice and Cllrs Bucknor for recalling their experience on the A1101. He invited all interested parties to sign up on forms at the back of the Hall.

The meeting was closed at 8.45pm

Annette Williams
Clerk to Walsoken Parish Council

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Chair of Walsoken Parish Council

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