

Earith Parish Council

Minutes of the Extra Ordinary Parish Council E-Meeting Held on Wednesday 24th February 2021 by Zoom

Present – Councillors

Mr Steve Edwards (Chairman)

Ms Hazel Lambert

Mrs Marilyn Russell

Mr Alan Spackman

Mr Nick Tindall

Miss Ann Brennan (Vice Chairman)

Mr Jeff Nicholls

Mr Allan Till

Mrs Paula Brown

10 members of the public

Mandy Pink – Clerk

Due to the Covid19 Government Lockdown measures the Earith Parish Council meeting was held via a video conferencing link, the Agenda was published on the Parish Council Website and emailed to the 68-member Newsletter Subscriber List. This means that at least 80 Households were notified of the Parish Council E-Meeting. Approximately 12% of the Village of Earith.

The Chairman opened the meeting and explained that each person would be asked to put forward comments individually so that all members of the Public and the Councillors could make their comments known and be understood.

Item 1 Apologies for absence – Mr Keith Hudson, Mrs Louise Reay, CC Mr Steve Criswell, DC Mr Jon Neish

Open Meeting

Item 2 Open Forum – 21 emailed comments had been received - 20 from Earith Residents and 1 from a Bluntisham Resident. Eight residents put forward comments which highlighted several areas. The High Street has 16 Listed Buildings and is in a Conservation Area. The pavements are narrow, and the constant traffic noise, vibration and pollution is causing damage to homes, especially those closest to the Road with little or no foundations. Maintenance of the Road was also highlighted as downgrading the road would result in loss of funding for the Counties Road Network and would probably not result in less traffic using the road. Some traffic calming measures could cause more damage than traffic so installing traffic calming would need to be carefully looked at. The volume and speed of the traffic is an issue though. Pedestrians and cyclists are in very close proximity to speeding vehicles and there is little or no enforcement by the Authorities. Cllr Nicholls stated that the HCV Group had previously carried out some environmental testing on the High Street that included vibration and pollution testing and this was all sent to the County Council about 8 years ago. The Clerk stated that if homes are being damaged then they will need to approach their insurance companies in the first instance and can then complete online forms from the County Council to state what damage has been done.

(Close open Meeting)

(Open closed section of Meeting)

Item 3 Councillors declaration of interest – The Chairman drew the Councillors attention to the legal requirement that all interests should be declared following the Code of Conduct Localism Act 2011 c7. s27(3)(b). – 3 members of the Council live on the High Street but their knowledge and understanding of the problem was needed in the discussion.

Item 4 Consultation regarding the Re-Classification of A1123 and A1421

The Chairman asked each Councillor in turn to make comments on this item.

Cllr Nicholls stated that changing the classification of the road would not result in less traffic and traffic calming measures can be installed on A roads as well as B roads, but these would need to be carefully looked into.

Cllr Russell stated that the road had deteriorated over the years and the health and safety of the Residents of the Village is paramount. There may not be a change to traffic flow in the short term but downgrading the road could open up more avenues to follow to make the road safer. Comments have been emailed and will be added to the minutes as an appendix.

Chairman stated that the A1123 meets all the criteria to be an A road as it is well used and well known as a significant route. Downgrading it can only happen if significant change has happened to other roads in the area. Legislation states that an A road must be maintained to a standard good enough to support a

40 tonne vehicle. If the road is downgraded, then 40 tonne vehicles will still use it, but the maintenance may not be appropriate due to its status. Cllr Criswell's report about the use of the traffic diamond states that a high proportion of traffic are going to destinations in the area rather than just passing through so these vehicles will still be using the road. Traffic calming measures can be installed but they may cause more harm than good and will need to be carefully looked at but doing nothing is not an option. The road is dangerous and other things need to be considered such as weight and height restrictions and possibly night-time use restrictions. These may be better pursued rather than traffic calming.

Cllr Till stated that just downgrading the road was not the only thing to consider. Any other additional things that can be achieved together with the downgrade would need to be looked at to make the change viable. The A14 has been upgraded and the Ely Bypass is now in operation so these major routes have been improved so the A1123 could be downgraded as significant changes have happened elsewhere in the area. If the Council choose to do nothing, then the problems of health and safety and traffic speeds and volumes and pollution will all get worse. Local businesses do still need to use the road, but downgrading could result in non-local traffic's decreased use and this would be a great advantage. If the road is damaged it will get maintained as the road network has to be maintained so less funding should not cause an issue long term as damage to the road surfaces will not be left untreated. Comments have been emailed and will be added to the minutes as an appendix.

Cllr Lambert stated that she has read all the comments received and seen the long debate on the Earith Village Facebook Page and opinions are widespread on this issue. The changes to the A14 and the Ely Bypass have reduced the traffic and downgrading will allow more opportunities for action to be taken regarding reducing traffic volumes, speed, and damage to properties. However, she does not know what the best answer is, and it is a very difficult decision to make but does understand that if we do nothing now then nothing will change.

Cllr Brown stated that if the road is declassified, without putting in additional road calming, where will all the traffic go that use the road now as there is no other easy route so they will continue to go through the village. Changing to a B road would mean less support and funding from the County Council. There are some big haulage companies in the Village and many local businesses who cannot afford to send their vehicles on a much longer route to avoid using the High Street. Traffic calming is not the answer as the negative effect of the calming outweighs the positive. There will still be pollution and noise and vibration at every stop and start of a vehicle along the route. The pavements are not wide enough to stop damage to homes.

Cllr Spackman stated that the Village must be careful what they wish for as it is unknown if there will be any traffic reduction due to the downgrading of the status of the road. The impact on speeding is also not known. What is evident is that the road will deteriorate. There will always be roadworks on the High Street either Utility works or the County carrying out repairs. These individual repairs are not always good enough. Earith High Street as an A road has been patched and made good and you can see the difference in this High Street as opposed to the roads in Willingham and Cottenham. If the High Street becomes a B road then these repairs may not be done, and the road could be left with little or no maintenance along its whole length.

Cllr Brennan stated that HCV's are constantly going to the Industrial Estate and the Estate is growing with more businesses and opportunities for the Village. Downgrading the road will not make any difference to these vehicle movements. If the road is downgraded, then this will have a lower priority for maintenance and will be left damaged for longer because of its status as a B road. The Village will never be granted a Bypass if the High Street is a B road as this will be judged as a non-strategic route and thus would not meet the criteria for a Bypass option. The Parish Council have already agreed a lot of projects with the County Council that have never been taken forward by them. There will never be a Haul Road due to the river crossings.

Cllr Tindall stated that he is undecided on this matter, but something does need to be done so that activity can be initiated.

With all Councillor views being tabled the Council discussed these views to come to a decision and the Chairman then called for proposals to be made.

Mr Jeff Nicholls proposed, and Miss Ann Brennan seconded that the road should remain as an A road with appropriate traffic calming being considered.

Resolved three for five against – Not Carried

Mr Allan Till proposed, and Mrs Marilyn Russell seconded that the road should be downgraded to a B road.

Resolved five for and three against – Motion Carried

Appendix 1 Councillor comments

Comments from Cllr Russell

Confirmed read S Criswell letter and agree if we do nothing nothing will change.

Confirmed read residents comments and agree with safety concerns.

Agree short term there may be little change even if downgraded from A to B

Referred to EP Plan 2011 & E Community Plan 2017 which highlight similar/same concerns regarding traffic as set out in current residents comments

AREAS OF CONCERN by way of example:

Safety of pedestrian residents crossing road & when on narrow pavements

Safety of cyclists ref. lorries quantity and back draft

Overall well being of residents from noise, pollution

Property damage to houses especially those without modern foundations

Access to High St. from side roads

Quantity of HGV's damaging road and pavements etc

Speed of traffic especially commercial vehicles.

Village economy - think less "through HGV's" will free up roads for local business traffic. Will make it more attractive for residents to use local amenities.

Agree with SC's comments IF WE DO NOTHING, NOTHING WILL CHANGE.

Comments from Cllr Till

If we do nothing, nothing will change.

A roads have changed character due to growth of large vehicles and traffic over last few decades

Not a strategic road, When Earith bridge is closed, HCV still able to move around

Earith High Street not suitable for massive lorries due to narrow road

The amount of HCV going through the village, the pollution, detriment to peoples' health

Physical danger of being on pavement during busy traffic hours is now intolerable

Noted how the village was transformed during less traffic periods, lots of families out walking on quieter roads.

This won't stop or affect local business traffic as they will still have access to industrial park

Listed buildings/Conservation area being undermined by huge lorries