

REPORT TO: Environment and Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 16 June 2010

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Environment and Economy

SUBJECT: Falkirk Avenue – Petition for New Road

WARDS: Birchfield

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To report the receipt of a Petition signed by 47 residents of Falkirk Avenue, Upton Rocks, Widnes, and to inform Members of the following:
- the concerns of Falkirk Avenue residents, relating to traffic using the street;
 - the suggestions made in the petition for resolving these issues;
 - the development of potential options aimed at addressing the petitioners' concerns; and
 - to recommend a proposed course of action

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) Members consider the contents of the petition;**
- 2) traffic conditions in Falkirk Avenue continue to be monitored;**
- 3) the feasibility of constructing new roads connecting from the boundaries of planned development sites (Upton Rocks H3 and Proposed Local Centre) to Westerhope Way continue to be explored; and**
- 4) the petitioners be informed of the Board's decision.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The Petition

A petition was received by the Council in March 2010, signed by 47 residents, representing the majority of properties in Falkirk Avenue. The Petition requests that the Council *"build a new road to divert traffic away from Falkirk Avenue"*, as *"the volume of traffic using the road has not reduced as expected since the opening of the new Queensbury Way link to Cronton Road."* A letter detailing residents' concerns, which includes a summary table of traffic flow figures gathered by the Council during the last three years, is included with the petition. This is attached in Appendix 1 of this report together with a plan identifying the addresses of those signing the petition.

The concerns raised in the letter can be summarised, as follows:

- the opening of Queensbury Way has not resulted in any significant decrease in traffic on Falkirk Avenue;
- large numbers of commercial vehicles are using Falkirk Avenue on a daily basis;
- assertion that the route is used as a main arterial route, by fire service, police and taxi drivers because Queensbury Way has failed to deliver a faster alternative route;
- children are unable to play outside due to fear of HGVs and high vehicle speeds;
- parked cars have been damaged by passing vehicles and there has been at least one head on collision;
- the steps taken so far by the Council have not been adequate, to reduce traffic volumes and speeds to a level appropriate to the road design;
- concern that the location of the Council's traffic speed counter did not represent the true maximum speeds. (but nevertheless that measured speeds are over 20mph);
- these problems may be exacerbated by construction of the local centre on neighbouring land.

The letter accompanying the petition asks that:

- 1) as a minimum, the promised weight restrictions should be implemented and clearly signposted at both entrances to Falkirk Avenue;
- 2) the speed limit should be effectively enforced;
- 3) in the medium term, that an alternative and quicker route from Birchfield Road to Queensbury Way should be constructed, to ensure that residents of Falkirk Avenue can use Falkirk Avenue with confidence and in safety.

3.2 Background Information

Falkirk Avenue and Lanark Gardens form part of the route connecting Queensbury Way to Birchfield Road via Marcien Way/Lofthouse Gate and Upton Bridle Path. It is the southernmost of two east-west routes serving the Upton Rocks development, the other being Upton Lane/Upton Rocks Avenue. Both of these east-west routes have significant residential frontage along their entire length, so great care needs to be taken when considering any measures which may redistribute traffic. A plan showing these routes (and the options referred to later in the report) is attached at Appendix 2.

The Upton Rocks Masterplan set out to integrate the established residential areas west of Birchfield Road with the new, Upton developments to the west. The east – west connecting routes, utilising Falkirk Avenue and Upton Rocks Avenue, were designed to encourage

that integration, with the layout of the roads being designed to discourage excessive speeds and deter through traffic.

The housing development comprising Falkirk Avenue and Lanark Gardens received planning permission in 2001/2. The estate layout was designed to incorporate 5.5m wide carriageways with 2m wide footways and a cycle route, all in accordance with the design guidance appropriate at the time (Design Bulletin 32), sufficient to serve up to around 300 dwellings.

The alignment was arranged to include a series of right angled junctions connected by short links, in an attempt to reduce speeds and deter through traffic, again in accordance with DB32. The housing layout was somewhat novel for the time in that dwellings were arranged closer to the highway with parking provided partly behind building lines, to improve street scene, a practice which has continued and is now embedded into the latest housing estate road layout design guidance, the Manual for Streets.

3.3 Interventions to date

Once the through route became established, a number of complaints about traffic speeds were received from residents of Falkirk Avenue. Traffic surveys were undertaken in 2005, which measured vehicle speeds at an average of 20mph and an 85th percentile speed (the speed which 85% of vehicles are not exceeding) of 24mph. In 2006, following consultation, two speed humps (low, narrow 'thump' type) were installed. At that time, the possibility of a closure of the street to through traffic was also considered and discussed with local ward Councillors, although this idea was rejected as not being practical. This is reviewed in section 3.5.

A Traffic Regulation Order aimed at restricting goods vehicles (by Weight Restriction Order, as referred to in the petitioner's letter) was also investigated in 2006. However the proposal was not progressed due to the high cost of signage. Again, this suggestion is discussed further in the options appraisal 3.5 below.

Responses to local search enquiries in connection with Upton Rocks development site H3 (Tickford Bank / Biddleston Cross development), now include the advice that the roads within the H3 Site have been designed to extend to the eastern boundary which could potentially allow future connection through to Falkirk Avenue from Galway Avenue. Again, this is discussed further in the options appraisal below.

The Council was also aware that the completion of Queensbury Way would have an impact upon traffic distribution in the area, and it was hoped that some relief would be provided to Falkirk Av, as Queensbury Way would give alternative access particularly to the north east and motorway junctions. Therefore, monitoring of traffic using Falkirk Avenue was undertaken before and after the opening of the new road.

3.4 Traffic Survey Findings

Several traffic surveys have been carried out by the Council in relation to traffic usage of Falkirk Avenue. These surveys have shown the following:

- In 2009, shortly after the opening of the Queensbury Way link, a weekday total of approximately 1200 vehicles used Falkirk Avenue each day, of which approximately 150 travelled during the weekday morning peak hour. The average traffic flow measured over a 12 hour period (07:00 to 19:00) is 76 vehicles per hour. To put this into perspective, this is equivalent to the flow expected on a residential estate road serving around 200 dwellings. (Falkirk Avenue is designed for 300). This represents an average reduction of approx 10% in the daily total traffic flow following the opening of Queensbury Way to Cronton Road.
- Peak hour flows have fallen by approx 30 vehicles compared with counts taken in 2008 before the Queensbury Way link was open.
- The proportion of heavy goods vehicles using Falkirk Avenue is around 2.8% (measured over 24 hour period). This is not unusual for a 'through road' within a residential estate in an urban area.
- A 'snapshot' origin and destination number-plate survey was undertaken during an afternoon period in March. The results of this survey showed that over 95% of vehicles using the Falkirk Avenue to Lofthouse Gate route did not travel straight through and therefore it can be surmised that the majority of drivers had a destination or business within the area.
- In 2009, traffic speed surveys (taken at the traffic counter positioned outside number 19 Falkirk Avenue) showed that the average vehicle speed was 15 mph and the 85th percentile speed was 19 mph. These figures are within the acceptable maximum speed of 20 mph as suggested in traffic calming advisory notes, and demonstrate a 5mph reduction in both average and 85th percentile speed following the installation of speed humps.

The petitioners have expressed concern that the traffic speed counter was sited close to the traffic calming speed thump and therefore readings taken did not truly represent vehicle speeds through the area. The position of the counting equipment is governed by the position of lighting columns, due to mounting and fixing requirements. In this case the counter was positioned as close as possible to the centre of the link, in order to give an indication of maximum speeds. This was prior to the traffic calming being implemented (in 2006). Since the installation of the speed hump any subsequent monitoring has taken place at the same location for consistency and to enable direct comparisons to be made.

The petitioners have asked that the existing speed limit should be effectively enforced. The traffic calming speed thumps are effective in

controlling vehicle speeds to below 20mph and therefore it is unlikely that police enforcement intervention would make any further significant improvement to the situation in the long term.

An analysis of road traffic accident data has also been undertaken. There are no personal injury accidents recorded in the three years from 2007-2009.

In summary, according to the collected traffic survey data, Falkirk Avenue currently carries less traffic than it was originally designed for and traffic flows have reduced by approximately 10% since the opening of Queensbury Way. Only a small proportion of traffic appears to be using the route as a through route from Upton Bridle Path to Queensbury Way and less than 3% of the traffic is HGVs. The records show that there are no injury accidents, and traffic speeds are within acceptable limits. Therefore, there is little evidence to justify significant intervention.

3.5 Option appraisal

Notwithstanding the above, a number of potential courses of action, which may reduce the impact of traffic using Falkirk Avenue have been investigated and are discussed below. The options are illustrated on the plan attached at Appendix 2.

Option 1 - New Road connecting 90 degree bends adjacent to House Nos. 3 and 23 Falkirk Avenue.

This would provide a short bypass to Falkirk Avenue and reduce traffic on the most circuitous section. However, this would not result in any traffic reduction for those residents living outside this short section, many of whom have signed the petition. Indeed, the shorter route may actually encourage more traffic, and higher vehicle speeds. This would involve the construction of approx 100m of new highway at an estimated cost of £0.25m. The new section of road would encroach into land which is designated for construction of a local centre and primary school. This option is considered to be of low overall benefit in relation to its cost.

Option 2 – New road connecting the western end of Westerhope Way to Lanark Gardens

This option would bypass the whole of Falkirk Avenue, by means of the construction of an additional 'through' road to Lanark Gardens, providing an alternative circuitous route. Falkirk Avenue would remain as a through route, but theoretically traffic flows should reduce by half. A sub option, allowing Falkirk Avenue to be closed as a through route, could also be considered. However this would merely transfer all through traffic onto the new route. The impacts of this would need to be assessed.

This option entails significant cost entailing the construction of an additional length of carriageway to connect to Westerhope Way. However,

the scheme could potentially be funded by the developer of the proposed school / local centre site. Planning proposals around the local centre are capable of being adapted to accommodate this option, although this development may take some time to come forward as a planning application.

Option 3 – New road connecting western end of Westerhope Road to Galway Avenue through Development Site H3 (via Tickford Bank / Biddlestone Cross)

Similar to Option 2, this option would also provide an additional through road via a circuitous route, this time to the south of Falkirk Avenue. It would provide a connection to Queensbury Way via Galway Avenue and an existing housing development site (Tickford Bank / Biddlestone Cross). The route would form part of proposed estate roads within Upton Rocks Site H3 (currently being developed). Approximately 130m of new highway would need to be constructed to link roads at the site Boundary to the western end of Westerhope Way.

Again this option entails significant cost as the future developer of Site H3 only has an obligation to construct up to his site boundary. Residents of existing properties on Tickford Bank / Biddlestone Cross, and of the rest of site H3 in the future, may be adversely affected by the provision of a through road passing their properties, although the possibility of this route has been advised in Local Authority Searches in relation to these property sales. It may not however have been identified in personal searches for HIPs etc.

Option 4 – Introduce a weight restriction order covering the Birchfield Ward.

This would involve progressing a traffic regulation order to restrict access by heavy goods vehicles. The order could not be limited to the immediate area surrounding Falkirk Avenue (as this would result in enforcement difficulties and need for large vehicles to turn in a residential area) but would need to cover all roads bound by Birchfield Road, Cronton Road, Queensbury Way and the Liverpool to Manchester railway line. Such a proposal would have a cost implication of approximately £15k for signage to cover the whole zone. The 2009 traffic surveys described in 3.4 show that there is a low percentage of heavy goods vehicles using Falkirk Avenue - a total of 33 vehicles in a 24 hour period represents 2.8% of total flow. These vehicles are quite likely to have destinations or business within the area (delivery vehicles etc.) and would be exempt from a restriction order anyway. It is not considered therefore that a weight restriction order would deliver any real improvements to the traffic conditions on Falkirk Avenue.

Option 5 – Closure of Falkirk Avenue to through traffic.

Although this has not been specifically requested or suggested by the petitioners, the feasibility of closing Falkirk Avenue to through traffic has been investigated and discussed with local ward councillors previously. These discussions concluded that a closure would be impractical for the following reasons:

- A closure would inconvenience a significant number of residents, whose sole access & egress to their property would be restricted to one direction – either via Queensbury Way or Via Birchfield Road.
- Displaced traffic would be likely to divert to the northerly through route via Julian Way, Upton Lane and Upton Rocks Avenue.
- A closure would create two long cul-de-sacs. Traffic flows would not reduce significantly due to the need for two-way return journeys.
- There is no convenient central point of closure between Lanark Gardens and Julian Way (the effective decision points at which drivers would choose to continue through Falkirk Avenue).
- A turning head would need to be formed either near to Grundy Close (Point 1) or Prestwick Close (Point 2) which would result in an uneven split of traffic from the various housing developments, adversely affecting the amenity of residents in other areas, and potentially be quite costly if new construction is required or existing carriageway materials need to be replaced.
- Advance signage of the closure of the through route would be complicated given the lengths of the resulting cul-de-sacs.
- Whilst the emergency services have yet to be consulted on the possibility of a closure of Falkirk Avenue, it is likely that services would be adversely affected due to the inconvenience and longer route involved, and therefore may raise objections to a proposal.

3.6 Discussion and Proposals

Options 1, 2 and 3 would all provide some degree of traffic relief to Falkirk Avenue. Each option involves the construction of a new section of road and therefore there are significant associated cost implications.

Option 1 provides relief to only part of Falkirk Avenue and could potentially increase vehicle speeds in the immediate vicinity as the existing speed controls imposed by the existing circuitous route and speed thumps would be by-passed. Therefore this option does not offer a cost effective solution.

Options 2 and 3 would both require negotiation and agreement with current and future developers of sites on Upton Rocks. In addition, Halton Borough Council funding is likely to be required in order to construct

additional lengths of road beyond the developer's site boundaries. It is proposed that the avenues for discussion and negotiation during the planning and subsequent adoption processes in relation to Site H3 and to the Local Centre / School site development are left open, with a view to securing agreement on the construction of a road connecting to the western end of Westerhope Way in the future. In the meantime, it is proposed to continue to monitor traffic conditions in Falkirk Avenue through the gathering of traffic flow and speed data.

Option 4 is not considered to deliver any significant benefit, nor is it viable as access by HGVs will always be required, and Option 5 is not considered to be viable.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The recommendation has no implications for Council policies.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The recommendation will have a small resource impact to continue traffic monitoring in the short term. Should options 2 or 3 be pursued in the future it is likely that a significant capital contribution would need to be made.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

There are no implications for this priority.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

There are no implications for this priority.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

There are no implications for this priority.

6.4 A Safer Halton

There are no implications for this priority.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

There are no implications for this priority.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 There are no significant risks associated with the recommendation.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 There are no implications for equality and diversity associated with the recommendation.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Consultation document 2006 – Falkirk Avenue Additional Thumps	Rutland House	Jonathan Farmer

APPENDIX 1 – PETITION AND PLAN SHOWING ADDRESSES OF PETITIONERS



