

Agenda Item 5

Minster Fields Community Group

Lexington Road

Lincoln

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Andy Gutherson
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Dear Mr Gutherson

19th October 2020

Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee Meeting – 26th October 2020

Possible Footbridge over the A158 Lincoln Bypass near the Nettleham Road Roundabout Junction with the A46 and the B1182

The Community Group of which I am the Acting Secretary has received various representations from its members about the need for a new footbridge at the above junction. The Community Group's Committee has decided to endorse those representations and has instructed me to convey its views to the County Council. The Community Group's submissions on the matter therefore follow this letter.

The Chairman of the County Council's Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee has kindly granted permission for me to speak at its forthcoming meeting about the issues raised. I shall be grateful if you will therefore ensure that the Community Group's submissions are copied to the people concerned within the County Council.

Please do not hesitate to let me know if there is anything further that I can do to assist in connection with this matter.

Yours sincerely

Andy Porter

Andy Porter (Acting Secretary)

cc Cllr Bob Adams – Chairman of the Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Mrs Jackie Brockway – Member of the Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Robin Renshaw - Member of the Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Richard Davies – Executive Councillor (Highways, Transport & IT)
Cllr Martin Hill OBE – Leader of the Council

We respect and take care of members' personal information, only keeping what is absolutely necessary. Full details are given in our Privacy Notice, which can be viewed under the "Files" tab on our Facebook Group page and which is available on request. Members should contact me if they would like us to update, correct or delete any information that we may hold about them. If they ask us to delete their email addresses from our records, we will not send any emails to them about our activities.

**Proposed Footbridge over the A158 section of the Lincoln Bypass
adjacent to the A158/A46/B1182 roundabout junction
Representations of the Minster Fields Community Group**

Overview

For the wellbeing of individuals as well as of the planet, it is preferable for people to walk, run or cycle rather than to drive. We therefore think that, wherever possible, the County Council should encourage and facilitate travel by non-motorised means.

We understand that the Council has already reviewed the above junction on the Lincoln Bypass and concluded that the crossing facilities for non-motorised users need to be upgraded both to improve safety and to encourage a more sustainable transport plan across the city and surrounding areas. We also understand that the Council decided to develop a project which would result in a grade separated pedestrian and cycle bridge over the Bypass, with design work scheduled for commencement early in 2020. It would seem, however, that the work has stalled.

For the reasons detailed below, it has for many years been surprisingly dangerous for non-motorised users to use the crossing. If they cannot cross safely, many are reluctant to cross at all. The issues of safety and non-motorised use are therefore inextricably linked. The Bypass in its present form acts as a barrier. Non-motorised users are actually deterred from using the crossing, rather than encouraged to do so. That is particularly perverse, as it is located on National Cycle Network Route 1, running from Dover to the Scottish Highlands, under the custodianship of Sustrans, the sustainable transport charity. The construction of a footbridge is already long-overdue.

The number of non-motorised users who can use the crossing (if it is safe to do so) is now increasing rapidly, due to the large new housing developments in the course of construction on the south eastern and south western sides of the junction. A new footbridge will encourage the occupiers of those developments to use the crossing. Failure to provide a footbridge will discourage them from doing so. The existing need for a safe crossing is therefore increasing.

The hazards of the crossing will grow significantly due to increased traffic volumes following the imminent opening of the Lincoln Eastern Bypass. The deterrent effect of the present crossing will therefore soon rise still further. The need for a footbridge will therefore very soon become even greater.

In anticipation of the opening of the Lincoln Eastern Bypass, preparatory work was undertaken at the beginning of this year to improve traffic flows at the junction. That work was paused due to the coronavirus outbreak, but we anticipate that it will resume when normality returns. Vehicles moving faster in more lanes will vastly increase the dangers and the deterrent effect. We think that it is therefore imperative that a footbridge should be erected when the approaches to the roundabout are widened.

A footbridge will be used by people who are presently afraid to cross the Bypass, including those with limited mobility. There are lots of bungalows in roads off the B1182 (particularly Wolsey Way and Searby Road) housing an elderly population: many mobility scooters are in evidence in that area but are noticeably absent from the path north of the roundabout. Nettleham also has an unusually elderly population.

E-scooters might also become a popular alternative in future.

A footbridge will be an essential and valuable addition to the county's infrastructure.

Where is the junction?

The junction is on the outskirts of Lincoln, approximately two miles north of the city centre. Running east/west is the Lincoln Bypass. Running north/south are roads following the route of the extension between Lincoln and Grimsby of the Fosse Way, dating back to Roman times. The four roads meet at a roundabout.

The A158 runs east from the roundabout, leading to Horncastle and Skegness, with connections to numerous other towns and villages: it attracts lots of holiday traffic in addition to the usual domestic, commercial and agricultural vehicles wanting to skirt the city. There are many heavy goods vehicles.

The A46 is used by vehicles to/from the west of Lincoln, also forming part of the Lincoln Bypass and also being very busy. The A46 then deviates to/from the north at the roundabout, attracting lots of traffic.

The B1182 is one of the main arterial roads into the heart of Lincoln and is extremely well-used.

How do non-motorised users cross the junction?

The only footpath leading all the way to the roundabout is on the eastern side of the B1182, continuing north after the roundabout on the eastern side of the A46. It then passes the few houses at Danby Hill (where there are some public footpaths across open countryside), subsequently connecting to roads leading to the villages of Nettleham (which is about one mile from the roundabout), Dunholme, Welton and beyond.

That footpath also operates as a cycle path which, as mentioned above, is part of the National Cycle Network Route 1. Only rarely do cyclists use the roads to navigate the roundabout: traffic, including many heavy goods vehicles, simply moves too quickly and too close to anyone biking along the main carriageways for them to be safe, so normally cyclists confine themselves to the crossing shared with pedestrians.

The footpath/cycle path crosses the A158 part of the Lincoln Bypass on the eastern side of the roundabout at ground level. There is no footbridge and there are no traffic lights or road markings, although there is a refuge half way across the A158.

What will be changing at the junction?

Traffic volumes will increase very significantly following the imminent opening of Lincoln's Eastern Bypass, which will attract drivers going north/south or south/north.

Preparatory work has already been undertaken to improve traffic flows, with the removal of trees, etc., to enable the number of lanes approaching the roundabout to be increased from two to three in all directions. That work has been paused following the coronavirus outbreak, even though a similar project is ongoing and nearing completion at the next roundabout to the west along the Bypass, at Riseholme Road.

Use of the footpath/cycle path will also increase as more homes are occupied in the vicinity of the junction. The Minster Fields housing development to the south east of the roundabout (whose owners and occupiers are represented by our Community Group) will eventually comprise 374 properties, but only 175 are occupied at the moment, so another 199 households will eventually move in. The Roman Gate housing development to the south west of the roundabout will eventually provide 280 homes but only 49 have been sold, so another 231 households will join the area.

How far is it from Minster Fields to the junction?

By road, it is over half a mile, although the route is in essence along three sides of a rectangle, i.e. leaving Minster Fields in a southerly direction along either Alexander Road or Gibson Road, turning right into Wolsey Way and then turning right again into the B1182.

There is however a short cut for non-motorised users via an alleyway from Wolsey Way, which leads to the B1182 closer to the roundabout, roughly opposite the Energie Fitness Gym and Starbucks.

There is another well-used, and even more direct, short cut. Our members have rights of way over a gravel track from the north west corner of Harland Road in Minster Fields, past Meg House and down the side of a field to the B1182 at a point just south of the roundabout.

Why do Minster Fields residents cross the Bypass at the junction?

Reasons given by our members include:-

- cycling for pleasure
- jogging for fitness
- enjoying walking for exercise: Nettleham is an attractive village, reached through open countryside and surrounded by various other public footpaths
- exercising pet dogs on the public footpaths around Danby Hill and Nettleham
- working in Nettleham, e.g. at the County Police Headquarters
- taking children to school in Nettleham, where there is a pre-school (for pupils between 2 and 5 years of age), an infant school (ages 5 to 7) and a junior school (ages 7 to 11): about half of the pupils travel from outside the village and there are problems with congestion and parking at "school run" times
- going to the William Farr school in Welton (ages 11 to 18)
- attending places of worship in Nettleham
- participating in groups that meet in the various venues that are available for hire in Nettleham
- visiting the shops, businesses (including the opticians), pubs and cafes in Nettleham.

Who else crosses the Bypass at the junction?

Residents of Minster Fields represent only a very small proportion of the people who cross the A158 by the roundabout. Occupiers of all the homes mentioned below can also do so.

The footpath on the east side of the B1182 continues south to the Longdales Road roundabout, continuing still further down Nettleham Road to the city centre. There is also a footpath on the west side of the B1182 and Nettleham Road for almost all of their length. There is housing (interspersed with some commercial premises and a sports ground) on both sides all along the B1182 and Nettleham Road. Numerous smaller streets connect to yet more housing from both sides of the B1182 and Nettleham Road.

The Roman Gate housing development, in the course of construction on the opposite side of the B1182, has already been mentioned.

Minster Fields is part of the much larger Glebe Park area of Lincoln, comprising the properties along Wolsey Way and the other roads leading off it. Wolsey Way is a spine road connecting the B1182 and A15 (Bunkers Hill/Wragby Road).

Occupiers of the few houses at Danby Hill can access the crossing from the north, as can residents from the villages of Nettleham, Dunholme and Welton, etc. Just south of the roundabout they can reach Waitrose, Asda, Iceland and various other shops and businesses, with very many more being located closer to the city centre. Many villagers come to Lincoln for reasons of work, school, business and pleasure, etc.

As a random exercise, two of our members counted the other people that they saw between the roundabout and Washdyke Lane (leading to Nettleham) when they walked there on the afternoon of Monday 21/09/20. They reported that the figures were:-

(a) when travelling south to north:-

- i. a couple of people were walking ahead of us in the same direction (with another couple ahead of them) and one person was following us;*
- ii. one person walked past us in the opposite direction;*
- iii. one person cycled past us in the same direction;*
- iv. eight people cycled past us in the opposite direction (first a mother with a young child, then a mother with two young children, then a pair of older children and finally an adult);*

(b) when travelling north to south:-

- i. five adults (one walking a dog) walked past us in the opposite direction, all travelling separately as individuals, rather than in groups;*
- ii. one cyclist – an older child – rode past us in the same direction;*
- iii. five people cycled past us in the opposite direction, all being adults travelling separately as individuals rather than in groups.*

A significant number of people therefore currently cross the Bypass at the junction, despite the dangers. More will do so as work on the adjacent housing developments progresses. There is plenty of scope to increase the numbers still more by removing the deterrent effect mentioned above.

What is it like crossing the junction on foot?

Tricky and sometimes scary. The speed of vehicles has to be assessed, along with the direction that they will take: those matters can be misjudged. Very few vehicles slow down to allow pedestrians to cross. It is frequently necessary to wait, often for quite a long time. It is tempting, after waiting for a while, to take a risk, attempting to cross when it is not entirely safe. Accidents do happen at the roundabout from time to time. At the moment, for example, the road sign normally situated on the eastern side of the centre of the roundabout is missing, because one of the posts on which it should be erected has been bent backwards following a collision. One of our members reported that she and her children (aged 6, 8 and 11) once had to be escorted across by the emergency services, who were dealing with an overturned lorry.

The spaces in which pedestrians have to wait before crossing from either side are surprisingly small. Because of limited visibility due to hedges, it is necessary to stand very close to the highway when crossing from the south (in order to see traffic coming along the A158 from the east) and from the north (in order to see traffic coming south from the A46 which will turn left into the A158). The refuge area half way across the A158 is also very small and it is necessary to stand in close proximity to the traffic while waiting to complete the crossing. It is daunting to be so close to traffic, particularly when it is moving very quickly and many vehicles are so big. Anyone failing to take sufficient care is at risk of serious personal injury. This is particularly relevant to children.

What are the dangers crossing the Bypass from south to north?

The initial challenge is to cross from the waiting point south of the A158 to the refuge area in the middle of that road. That entails avoiding vehicles approaching the roundabout along the A158 from the east.

Such vehicles approach initially in single file traffic, although immediately before the roundabout the road broadens to two lanes. The hazards will increase significantly if there are plans to widen that point of the road further to three lanes. Drivers tend to arrive at high speed: there are no speed restrictions, so the national speed limit of 60mph applies. The approach follows a straight stretch of carriageway in a rural setting, with no footpaths running along either side of the road. The roundabout only becomes visible after passing the brow of a hill. Although there are road signs warning of the presence of the roundabout, there are no road signs warning that pedestrians might be crossing. The bend in the road immediately before the roundabout, coupled with hedging to the south of the A158, obscures until shortly before the junction drivers' views of the area in which pedestrians have to wait to cross from the south. Drivers' primary attention is on traffic coming round the roundabout from the right, not on any pedestrians wanting to cross the road from the left. Pedestrians' views of the approaching traffic are restricted by the hedge, the bend in the road and the brow of the hill.

On occasions, traffic approaching the roundabout from the east along the A158 can be stationary, normally because of issues at the Riseholme roundabout further along the A46. Care has to be taken when crossing between two stationary vehicles, because there is always the possibility of them being overtaken by an unseen motorcycle or another vehicle in the outside lane.

Having reached the refuge area in the middle of the A158, the next challenge is for pedestrians to cross to the north side over a section of road that is wide enough for two vehicles, while avoiding traffic entering the A158 in an easterly direction. Attention has to be paid to traffic coming south down the A46 turning left, to traffic coming eastwards along the A46 continuing straight on and to traffic from the south along the B1182, turning right. Pedestrians' views of the traffic are quite good but it is easy to be misled as to a driver's intentions at the roundabout, as indicators are not always used in accordance with the Highway Code and as the positioning of vehicles going round the roundabout can be careless. If the A158 is widened further at this point, crossing on foot will become even more dangerous.

What are the dangers crossing the Bypass from north to south?

The initial challenge is to cross from the waiting point north of the A158 to the refuge area in the middle of that road. Normally drivers accelerate on exiting a roundabout, but in this case the crossing point is at the exit. Vehicles approaching from three directions have to be considered. The

points made above about unreliable use of indicators and misleading positioning while driving round the roundabout are equally valid in all the following cases.

The greatest threat is from vehicles coming south down the A46 and turning left at the roundabout, rather than going straight on or turning right. They approach initially in single file, although the road broadens to two lines in the lead up to the roundabout. Drivers tend to arrive at high speed, the 60mph limit applying. The approach is largely straight in a completely rural area. As the path runs parallel with the road on the near side of drivers, they should be aware of its existence and of the possibility of pedestrians wanting to cross immediately after the exit to the roundabout, although there are no signs warning of pedestrians crossing. Drivers' main focus will be on traffic coming round the roundabout from their right, rather than on pedestrians crossing the exit to the roundabout on their left. Visibility of the area north of the A158 in which pedestrians wait to cross is restricted by the hedge, which equally limits pedestrians' view of approaching traffic.

It is easier to see and be seen by vehicles approaching the roundabout from the west along the A46, although views are slightly limited by the brow of the hill and by the bend in the road. Those vehicles also arrive at high speed, the 60mph limit applying, in single file (until the road width doubles immediately before the roundabout) after driving through a rural setting with no footpaths on either side of the carriageway. There is no sign warning of pedestrians crossing. The danger is posed by vehicles going straight on at the roundabout, rather than by those turning left or right.

Less dangerous are vehicles approaching the roundabout along the B1182 from the south. Those that turn left or go straight on are not a threat, which only comes from those turning right into the A158. They approach the roundabout more slowly and through a suburban landscape, with (for the most part) footpaths on both sides of the carriageway. There is a single lane until quite close to the roundabout, when the road width doubles. A speed limit of 40mph applies along the approach, although it is derestricted immediately before the roundabout, from which point the national speed limit of 60mph applies. Drivers approaching from that direction tend to be more cautious than those coming from the other directions but they are tempted to accelerate on exiting the roundabout, as they enter a rural area after leaving a suburban one. Once again, there is not actually any sign warning of pedestrians crossing.

Having reached the refuge area in the middle of the A158, the next challenge is for pedestrians to cross to the south side over the section of road that is wide enough for two vehicles, while avoiding traffic approaching the roundabout from the east along the A158. The key issues have been outlined above when commenting on the same crossing in the opposite direction, although the hedge is not a hindrance when going from north to south.

What should be done to improve safety at the crossing?

We are not experts and do not know what research was undertaken before the initial decision by the Council to plan for the construction of a footbridge.

Assuming that the Council already has data about traffic volumes and flows at the roundabout, we would expect it to need updating once the Lincoln Eastern Bypass is opened.

Presumably the Council also has data about accidents at the junction at which personal injuries have been suffered, as well as about damage-only accidents of which the police have been made aware.

We do not know what monitoring is undertaken of actual usage of the crossing by pedestrians and cyclists, etc., but adjustments will be required to allow for the growth of the new housing developments nearby.

The number of people who could use the crossing if they thought that it was safe to do so, but who are presently afraid to do so, should also be demonstrable by research.

A risk assessment (which should also allow for any lane widening or other improvements being proposed) can then be undertaken with that data.

We would expect any such assessment to conclude that better safety measures are imperative.

Signage warning drivers of pedestrians crossing is an obvious omission at the moment, but its installation is only likely to have a marginal impact.

We do not think that traffic lights or a zebra crossing are likely to be realistic options, because they would interrupt the fast flow of traffic. The roundabout is in a dip on the Bypass, so views would remain obstructed: the risks would not be eliminated completely.

We consider that a footbridge is the only sensible option. The risk of vehicles colliding with pedestrians will be eliminated, as will the risk of cars having damage-only accidents when swerving to avoid pedestrians. We would therefore welcome the planning, costing and eventual construction of a footbridge.

Will the construction of a footbridge create any planning problems?

A relatively small strip of land will have to be acquired by the Council on each side of the A158 near the roundabout. The area concerned north of the A158 is undeveloped farm land. The area concerned to the south of the A158 is in a field owned by the developer of Minster Fields which will, when the development is completed, be transferred for a nominal £1 to a management company of which only the householders on the development will be the members and directors. The developer and the management company are under legal obligations to use the field only as open land: it will therefore not be developed in the years ahead. Accordingly, the land will not be particularly expensive to acquire and the footbridge will be well away from any buildings, not impairing any views of the countryside.

What is the weight of opinion in Minster Fields behind these representations?

Our Community Group was formally constituted last year to address issues that kept recurring in an informal Facebook Group set up by residents of Minster Fields. Those issues related to management of the communal areas, poor broadband connections, security and behaviour (e.g. inconsiderate parking). Other issues have since cropped up, such as supporting self-isolating residents during the pandemic. The latest issue that we have been asked to consider is the need for a footbridge at the crossing.

Our Community Group's Committee is conscious that there is a danger of a vocal minority of residents expressing opinions that are not shared by a silent majority. We have therefore endeavoured to be objective, taking a low-key approach when seeking views. We have not held any meetings (virtual or in person) at which the issue has been raised. We have not leafleted houses. We have not accosted individuals asking them to sign petitions. We have merely published two posts

about the issue in our Facebook Group and mentioned it in one email, which also gave updates on eight other topical issues.

We anticipated that most residents would be much more focused on matters in Lincoln to the south and accordingly we expected a very limited response. If everyone read the Facebook posts and/or the email, we would have reached 128 households. The 22 households from which responses were actually received (details of which can be provided if required) were unanimously in favour of a bridge. In all the circumstances, we think that a response rate of at least 17% is extremely strong. We are aware that word of the exercise has spread on the grapevine to other areas affected by the same issue, leading to supportive messages to Councillors from people living elsewhere, which reinforce the representations made by us.