

**LABEL: PUBLIC**



**ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

**PETITION - REQUEST FOR THE REMOVAL OF THE SPACES FOR PEOPLE  
TEMPORARY 20MPH SPEED LIMITS**

**REPORT BY HEAD OF OPERATIONAL SERVICES**

**A. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The purpose of this report is to inform the Panel of the receipt of an electronic online petition remitted to the Environment PDSP from the Council Executive at its meeting on the 15 December 2020.

**B. RECOMMENDATION**

The Panel should note and consider the following recommendation which is intended to be submitted to the Council Executive for approval.

It is recommended that the Spaces for People temporary 20mph speed limits in West Lothian be assessed and evaluated by officers at the conclusion of the temporary project's duration as part of the whole project as originally planned and taking into account council's decision of 29 September 2020, however in line with Scottish Government guidance the measures will be removed when the national Covid-19 restrictions are fully lifted.

**C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

<b>I Council Values</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Focusing on our customers' needs; and</li><li>• Being honest, open and accountable;</li></ul>
<b>II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)</b>	<p><b>Policy:</b> The council's procedures on dealing with petitions require that petitions are considered by the Council Executive.</p> <p><b>Legal:</b> None.</p>
<b>III Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers</b>	None.
<b>IV Impact on performance and performance Indicators</b>	None.
<b>V Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement</b>	None.

<b>VI Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)</b>	<b>Financial:</b> None. <b>Staffing:</b> None. <b>Property:</b> None.
<b>VII Consideration at PDSP</b>	N/A
<b>VIII Other consultations</b>	None

## **D. TERMS OF REPORT**

### **D1 Background**

A petition which has been signed by 4881 people has been received by the council. This petition is still open to be signed by the public and as of the 25 January 2021 there were 5018 signatories. The petition is titled "Remove 20mph Speed Limits from Main Roads Across West Lothian". The petition is attached in Appendix 1. It was considered at Council Executive on 15 December 2020 when its organiser took part as a deputation. It was remitted to the PDSP for consideration and a report will be made to Council Executive when that has been done, setting out officers' recommendations and a note of the PDSP's consideration.

The introduction of temporary 20mph speed limits in West Lothian towns and villages is part of a programme of initiatives funded via Scottish Government's Spaces for People fund. This funding was made available last summer for temporary measures during the Covid-19 pandemic which would make it safer for people who choose to walk, cycle or wheel for essential trips and exercise during Covid-19.

Sustrans (on behalf of the Scottish Government) approved funding on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2020 for nine work packages including the temporary speed limit changes. The funding and works are additional to the Council's own revenue and capital roads programmes. Officers presented the proposals to Council Executive on 23 June 2020 when the recommendations were approved unanimously by the committee.

Due to the timescales to install these measures public consultation relaxations were made by the Scottish Government to ensure that temporary measures were installed as quickly as possible across the country to assist with the Covid-19 health pandemic.

Since approval of the measures on 23 June 2020, officers were instructed at a meeting of full council on 29 September 2020 to "... monitor the impact of the temporary speed restrictions on vehicle drivers including accident statistics, traffic convictions and complaints, to use these results to assess future speed reduction measures in place of the current measure of "no serious accidents have been recorded" which prevents speed reduction measures being implemented at present". Any evaluation of the Spaces for People projects, especially the 20 mph zones, will be carried out accordingly.

## D2 Assessment of the petition

Officers' views on the statements made in the petition are outlined below.

### Waste of Tax Payers Funds

The petition states "*West Lothian Council has wasted £600,000 from the taxpayer on the "Spaces for People" scheme, which has involved reducing the speed limit on main roads across West Lothian to 20mph*"

The total funding approved for all nine Spaces for People work packages is £818,500. Of this funding, a total construction cost of £87,500 has been spent on the implementation of the temporary 20mph speed limits. Officers are of the view that funding has not been wasted. The work packages undertaken have delivered local improvements to assist with physical distancing during Covid-19 making our towns and villages a better environment for those who choose to walk, cycle or wheel for essential trips and exercise through the reduction of traffic speeds.

### Obstruction of People, Businesses and Other Services/Pandering to Minority Cycling Enthusiasts

The petition states that "reducing the speed limit on main roads across West Lothian to 20mph in order to try and obstruct the majority of people, businesses, and other services grinding them to a halt. This has created extensive frustration and delay to the people of West Lothian. The council claims that this is in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic but is instead using it as a guise to enforce an agenda of pandering to minority cycling enthusiasts."

Research suggests that the reduction in speed will not significantly increase journey times. In addition, the lower speed limit can encourage drivers to shift to walking or cycling, particularly when the average journey to their destination is less than three miles which is a benefit for the public during Covid-19 restrictions. This shift can help lead to fewer motor vehicles on the road and a reduction in congestion and therefore journey time. This will benefit all road users.

Driving more slowly requires a change of habits. Rather than speed up to get to the next traffic queue in urban areas, it encourages a mindset of relaxing, taking one's time and enjoying the journey. For some this will be quite a change and will require conscious driving decision making in the initial stages.

Research suggests that any small time disadvantage to drivers is considered to be outweighed by the road safety benefits (of less severe and fewer casualties) alone. When wider health benefits are considered such as improved heart health through more people choosing to walk or cycle more, and improved respiratory function through cleaner air, the health benefits far outweigh any small time loss.

Businesses and individuals benefit from a more pleasant environment for shopping, work and leisure. For shopping 20mph provides a more convivial environment where people feel less intimidated by moving traffic. A 20mph limit encourages more people to walk and cycle and people who walk and cycle to local shops spend more money than those who travel by car (who, on average, use out of town supermarkets more). This is a benefit to trading in the town centres and urban areas where these speed limits have been reduced allowing a safer environment for people to make essential trips to local businesses during Covid19 restrictions.

The suggestion made within the petition that these measures were installed “as a guise to enforce an agenda of pandering to minority cycling enthusiasts” is not the case. The temporary 20mph speed limits were introduced to support the wider objectives set by the Scottish Government which were directly aimed at assisting with physical distancing and encouraging active travel. The introduction of the temporary 20mph speed limits clearly benefit more than just cyclists.

#### Lack of consultation

The petition states that *“This action is one of the most uncalled for and forced ever performed by West Lothian Council as the well-disguised “survey” conducted by them involved just 471 people, approximately 0.25% of the West Lothian adult population. It is clear that this survey is a misrepresentation of the community.”*

It is acknowledged that these measures have been introduced into the community quickly. Information on the measures has however been issued through the council’s website, local newspapers and social media. Normal consultation channels were restricted during Covid-19. The grant offer funding was for a limited period only and this did not help with having a wider consultation. However, a public on-line consultation was carried out between 15<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> May allowing everyone to participate and put forward their views and ideas on a range of measures.

Due to the timescales to install these measures public consultation relaxations were made by the Scottish Government to ensure that these temporary measures were installed as quickly as possible across the country to assist with the Covid-19 health pandemic. The consultation and its outcome, and the measures proposed, were covered in the report to committee on 23 June 2020 when approval was given to proceed.

The temporary 20mph speed limits have been installed using a Temporary Traffic Regulation Order for a period of 18 months. This can legally be extended if required, however after this second period it cannot be extended further and must be removed. If in future any temporary 20mph speed limits were to be considered for permanency, then the normal statutory process for promoting a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) would be required. This process involves statutory consultation, advertisement and resolution of any objections received before the legal TRO can be made.

#### Revenue making scheme, mass criminalising the public and no benefit

The petition further states *“There has been a clear, universal disagreement with this measure as it is seeking to mass criminalise everyday people and use them as a means for more revenue. This is completely undemocratic and to note there have been several studies that have shown 20mph limits on main roads are a waste of resources. Not only do these increase journey times and traffic, they also increase the risk of accidents due to less caution being exercised by other people. Additionally, this scheme has created huge amounts of confusion and undermines the 20mph limit on side streets and estates. There is absolutely no benefit immediately or long term to the taxpayer for this when the budget could have been actually worthwhile spent elsewhere.”*

Police Scotland enforce speed limits on the public road network and West Lothian Council have no powers to enforce any speed limits. As a result, any motorists that illegally break the speed limit on public roads are committing a road traffic offence enforceable by law. Any penalties that may apply, financial, licence points or custodial sentences are a matter for the courts to decide. No revenue is received by the council as a result of these legal processes.

It is the view of officers that reducing speeds means that residents, pedestrians and cyclists can live and travel more safely. Lower speeds mean that people feel more comfortable to walk and cycle and it is safer for children to walk to school, while older people also feel more able to travel independently and safely. There is a very large body of evidence from across the world that vehicle speeds are the main reason why people do not walk or cycle or do not allow their children to walk or cycle to school. Nationally, over half of all incidents in which people are injured happen on urban roads with a maximum speed limit of 30mph.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) says: "An analysis of vehicle speed in pedestrian fatalities in Great Britain found that 85% of pedestrians killed when struck by cars died in collisions that occurred at impact speeds below 40mph, 45% at less than 30 mph and 5% at speeds below 20 mph." These statistics are illustrated by the fact that in the distance a 20mph car can stop, a 30mph car will still be doing 24mph.

#### Closing statements in the petition

The criteria set out by the Scottish Government for the Spaces for People funding is for the implementation of temporary measures to support to make it safer for people who choose to walk, cycle or wheel for essential trips and exercise during Covid-19. Due to this, these measures are not "*long term*" and are in no way "*changing the law using a back door method*".

Finally, the petition concludes with the statement "*the council should revert this change and stay out of trying to inhibit the taxpaying public and their use of public roads in a sensible manner*". The introduction of the temporary 20mph speed limits have been introduced for good reason and do not restrict the use of the public road network. The council as a roads authority use various tools to control driver behaviour on its roads and this is no different. The temporary speed limits introduced at this time are not considered to be excessive in terms of "*inhibiting*" motorists and when balanced with the wider health and accident benefits are considered appropriate by officers during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **D3 NEXT STEPS**

As originally planned, and as instructed by council on 29 September 2020, officers will assess and evaluate the temporary 20mph speed limit measures that have been introduced. This work is dependent on further data collection which is currently on hold due to the tightening of current Covid-19 restrictions. Officers plan to undertake the data collection as soon as restrictions are relaxed and travel movements represent more closely the pre-introduction levels to allow comparison. This evaluation work will be reported back to the PDSP once it can be completed and national Covid-19 restrictions are lifted. The timescales for evaluation and reporting will be dependent on the need to target resources elsewhere in relation to COVID or other significant risk and factors.

### **E. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion officers recommend the Spaces for People temporary 20mph speed limits in West Lothian are assessed and evaluated by officers as originally planned, however in line with Scottish Government guidance the measures will be removed when the national Covid-19 restrictions are fully lifted.

## **F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES**

Council Executive, 23 June 2020. -

<https://coins.westlothian.gov.uk/coins/viewDoc.asp?c=e%97%9Dh%94q%7E%88>

West Lothian Council, 29 September 2020

<https://coins.westlothian.gov.uk/coins/viewDoc.asp?c=e%97%9Dh%95o%81%8C>

Spaces for People guidance - <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/our-blog/projects/2020/scotland/spaces-for-people-making-essential-travel-and-exercise-safer-during-coronavirus>

### **Appendices/Attachments:**

Appendix 1 – Petition received.

Contact Person: Gordon Brown, Roads Network Manager tel: 01506 282340, e-mail: [gordon.brown@westlothian.gov.uk](mailto:gordon.brown@westlothian.gov.uk)

Jim Jack, Head of Operational Services, Whitehill House, Whitestone Place, Bathgate, West Lothian

Date: 2 February 2020

# Remove 20mph Speed Limits from Main Roads Across West Lothian



**4,881 have signed.** Let's get to 5,000!

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## **Lorenzo F started this petition to West Lothian Council**

West Lothian Council has wasted £600,000 from the taxpayer on the "Spaces for People" scheme, which has involved reducing the speed limit on main roads across West Lothian to 20mph in order to try and obstruct the majority of people, businesses, and other services grinding them to a halt. This has created extensive frustration and delay to the people of West Lothian. The council claims that this is in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic but is instead using it as a guise to enforce an agenda of pandering to minority cycling enthusiasts.

This action is one of the most uncalled for and forced ever performed by West Lothian Council as the well-disguised "survey" conducted by them involved just 471 people, approximately 0.25% of the West Lothian adult population. It is clear that this survey is a misrepresentation of the community.

There has been a clear, universal disagreement with this measure as it is seeking to mass criminalise everyday people and use them as a means for more revenue. This is completely undemocratic and to note there have been several studies that have shown 20mph limits on main roads are a waste of resources. Not only do these increase journey times and traffic, they also increase the risk of accidents due to less caution being exercised by other people. Additionally, this scheme has created huge amounts of confusion and undermines the 20mph limit on side streets and estates. There is absolutely no benefit immediately or long term to the taxpayer for this when the budget could have been actually worthwhile spent elsewhere.

By trying to force this agenda on people it has been clear that the council is trying to change the law using a back door method, as this is a blatant mass abuse of "experimental" Traffic Regulation Orders across the majority of the county. Despite wasting this money the council is continuing to campaign for more money to squander from the Scottish Government and claims it is "underfunded" desperately. The execution of this is an utterly ridiculous mismanagement of a vital resource and the council should revert this change and stay out of trying to inhibit the taxpaying public and their use of public roads in a sensible manor.