

CC Report for the Town Council Meeting 17 November 2022

This report covers the period 15 October to 11 November to ensure the report can be seen by all fellow town councillors with all other council papers prior to the above meeting.

To date there has not been any update/reports following on from the recent fatality on the A374. However, both myself and Kate have submitted a joint Expression of interest to limit the speed even further westward to 40 mph. Additionally the new Portfolio Holder for Transport, Cllr Connor Donnithorne, paid a brief visit to East Cornwall on 10th November and I was able to physically demonstrate to him my concerns over the lack of visibility/time when exiting the car park to Torpoint Cemetery. I also informed him that I had already enquired about the siting of some Caution signs along that road reference (almost) the concealed entrance with timings of less than 10 seconds of vehicles approaching in either direction to allow exit.

There has been some correspondence about both pedestrians and two wheeled users – motorised or not awaiting the Torpoint Ferry on either side of the river concerning the lack of shelter and additionally their positioning on the ferry, below is a very detailed answer from the Ferry Operations Manager which may be useful to other town councillors should they be approached on this subject:

I'm very concerned to hear about the unreasonable and inconsistent approach witnessed about members of the ferry staff as they are all inducted, trained and regularly reminded of their responsibilities, procedures and the organisations approach and expectations of exceptional customer service. It's acknowledged that there have been isolated occasions in the past where staff have fallen short of acceptable standards, but please be assured these have and will continue to be addressed in a proportionate, prompt and appropriate manner. If *** could provide some details of the date and approximate time of the instance I will personally ensure available CCTV footage is reviewed, establish the facts and address the specific situation. Additionally, we have reinforced the message with all customer facing staff, reminding them of expectations, the unacceptable impact of poor interaction with customers, the wider public and reputation of the service and wider undertaking.

Cycle Queuing at Slipway Ingress/Egress rather than Traffic Lanes:

There have never been cyclist shelters at Torpoint or Devonport since the current generation of ferries have been in service. Torpoint embarkation point does have a "out of service/unused" bus stop at the head of Plym ferry slipway, but was never intended as a cyclist waiting area. The shelters at Devonport slipways were positioned and intended for foot passengers. Overtime the use of all these shelters evolved and traffic management processes may have become somewhat relaxed creating opportunity for cyclists to free run to embarkation points rather than queue with other highway traffic by previous management teams. It was coincidental that this approach was changed at the end of March 2020, 3 months after I took up my original position as Ferry Operations Manager and as the Covid pandemic erupted. After reviewing operational procedures it wasn't deemed safe by the current ferry management team or wider ferry crew who's feedback highlighted frequent observation of unreasonable and unsafe practice by drivers, foot passengers and cyclists. There was an increasing trend of incidents and accidents on slipways which on investigation were often indirectly attributed to cyclists queuing at slipways and delaying scheduled departures. It was also apparent that this created additional challenges and concerns for the tower supervisors responsible for traffic management and shoreside safety, and, in the case of Torpoint, adjacent to a busy public highway. The change ensured an additional level of mitigation for safety, resilience of the operation and reinforced a consistent approach across all nine crews to support the 1294 (+) scheduled departures each week. It's worth noting that these slipways are on a tidal stretch of the river and alongside unprotected heavy ferry chains and moving tackle that attract significant additional risks to customers and therefore operational effectiveness. Additionally, loading and unloading of the ferries invariably involves large queues of moving traffic. We've considered options for mitigation to support cyclist preference, but lack resource, real estate and infrastructure to ensure we could support this safely.

As safety is primacy of the service, the current procedure accommodates cyclists who queue in the priority lanes in segregation of cars and LGV's, allowing us to manage traffic and effectively call it forward to embarkation points safely and efficiently to meet scheduled departures regardless of the varying levels of demand.

Cycle Loading, Unloading and Vehicle Deck Stowage:

When loading, the Traffic Manager (Tower Supervisor) informs the Ferry Controller (Skipper) how many cyclists and motorcycles are waiting in the priority lane, and whether to expect a full load. This is then relayed to one of 36 trained loaders who will be manning the vehicle deck. This information is used to make a dynamic operational decision and based on service demand and traffic/congestion to support whether we should or should not part fill Lane F (motorcycle/cycle lane) on the ferries with additional cars queuing in the lanes. In peak traffic periods and unprecedented demand, we do maximise loading capacity of the ferries to minimise wider disruption to the road networks and communities on either side of the river, but this is not at the expense of a full load of waiting motorcycles or cyclists. Of course, every load is different and the volume and type of traffic queuing shoreside between the commencement and completion of a ferry loading cycle can change quite dramatically and quickly. Information is relayed between the three focal points and loading plans may be adjusted accordingly. However, I would emphasise that these situations shouldn't impact on the fairness to users if they apply the procedure competently as trained.

Future of Cyclist Shelters:

Real estate and infrastructure on both sides of the river is at a premium and further restricted by existing traffic management arrangements. Work had been underway with the previous ferry management team scoping ideas to refresh traffic management routes and systems to meet current and future demand. This included support for pedestrians and cyclists, but unfortunately stalled due to the pandemic. There are plans to reinvigorate the review of this capital project after FY 2023 commences and I will ensure management and shelter of cyclists is included as a planning consideration, aligning with decarbonisation and environmental initiatives

On a separate issue I attended the Ferry Offices for a tour of the staffing areas and to note the overcrowded offices and inadequate facilities the ferry admin and maintenance staff are having to work with and will be giving a verbal report at the next meeting of the Joint Cross Tamar Management Mtg. in December.

Further to my last report I have now had a response from Open Spaces reference the Promenade and the intention is to look to replace the roofing and complete a full survey of the benches.

Again, as per last report there is still no news about the date of the demolition of the garages or what is planned post demolition. I have escalated this now purely on the basis that the garages needed to be vacated with a fair amount of haste, but this is not now being replicated by their removal and a forward plan.

With the exception of the Pension Fund Mtg there have not been any CC Meetings during this period as they have either been cancelled or moved right, to the end of November.

Attended Falmouth University on Saturday 22 October with the Town Clerk. Interesting presentations on various aspects of Neighbourhood Planning during the morning but a little too centred and personal in the afternoon to glean anything worthwhile from.

Various Virtual Mtgs.