

AT A MEETING of the REGULATORY COMMITTEE – SCHOOL TRANSPORT APPEAL PANEL held at Hampshire County Council, The Castle, Winchester on Tuesday 14 October 2014.

PRESENT:

Councillors: R. McIntosh (Chairman); R. Price; T. Rolt.

1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

That Councillor R. McIntosh be appointed Chairman for this meeting only.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were mindful that, where they believed they had a disclosable pecuniary interest in any matter considered at the meeting, they must declare that interest at the time of the relevant debate and, having regard to the circumstances described in Part 3 Paragraph 1.5 of the County Council's Members' Code of Conduct, leave the meeting while the matter was discussed, save for exercising any right to speak in accordance with Paragraph 1.6 of the Code. Furthermore, Members were mindful that where they believed they had a non-pecuniary interest in a matter being considered at the meeting, they considered whether such interest should be declared, and having regard to Part 5, Paragraph 2 of the Code, considered whether it was appropriate to leave the meeting whilst the matter was discussed, save for exercising any right to speak in accordance with the Code.

There were no declarations of interest made by the members of the panel under this item.

3 DEPUTATIONS

No deputations were received.

4 SCHOOL TRANSPORT APPEAL: SUNNYBANK FARM, ROPLEY, TO PERINS SCHOOL, ALRESFORD

The panel considered the report of the Director of Economy, Transport and Environment (Item 4 in the Minute Book) on the walking route between Sunnybank Farm, Ropley, and Perins School, Alresford.

Having previously walked the route that morning accompanied by officers from the Economy, Transport and Environment Department and the appellant, the panel considered the evidence and concerns expressed by the appellant and concluded that the route was available accompanied, but not unaccompanied.

Members were mindful of section 2 of the Road Safety GB Guidelines on the Assessment of Walked Routes to School, but felt that parental vigilance was necessary to ensure the safety of a child walking the route. The panel's particular reasons for their findings were:

- There were good sight lines at the crossing points used by the Road Safety Officer; the route did appear to be lightly trafficked and the footpaths were of a good size for the majority of the route.
- However, the panel believed that parental vigilance was necessary to ensure the safety of a child walking this route at two of the crossing points. Whilst the panel understood these crossing points being chosen, because they provided the best sight lines and allowed the pedestrian to continue walking on footpaths, they felt that a child of school age would not be able to make the assessment to cross at these points. The panel concluded that as they involved crossing over grass verges, a child would choose the line of least resistance, and cross where the grass verge dropped at places with poor sight lines.
- Whilst members understood that under section 444(5) of the Education Act 1996, 3 miles was considered to be an acceptable distance for a child of 11-16, they were concerned about the physical impact that walking a distance of 2.75 miles could have on a child's decision making capacity, without a responsible parent or carer accompanying them.
- The panel were concerned about the impact on pedestrians of the buses and heavy goods vehicles using the road, especially at times of poor visibility along the stretch of narrow footpath just after the roundabout and towards the junction of Northside Lane.

Therefore, whilst the panel believed that in accordance with the Road Safety GB guidelines, the route was available, this was only the case when a child was accompanied by a responsible parent or carer. Consequently, they concluded that the route between Sunnybank Farm, Ropley and Perins School, Alresford, was available accompanied, but not unaccompanied.

The panel requested that the route be measured again by an officer from the Economy, Transport and Environment Department using a trundle wheel, as a matter of urgency to clear up any uncertainty over the distance of the route. Therefore, this decision is subject to the route being re-measured to provide a definitive distance, and confirmation that the route remains below 3 miles.

It was noted that because of this decision, separate consideration would be given by the Children's Services Department to any parents or carers who are unable to accompany their children by virtue of individual circumstances.

RESOLVED:

That the walking route between Sunnybank Farm, Ropley and Perins School, Alresford, is available accompanied, but not unaccompanied.

ADDENDUM:

Subsequent to the panel's request, the route was re-measured using a trundle wheel, and was found to be 2.8 miles long. This was below the acceptable distance for a child aged 11-16 under section 444(5) of the Education Act 1996, and therefore, the decision of the panel was confirmed.