

REGULATORY COMMITTEE

15th MAY 2002

WILTON/SALISBURY: FAIRVIEW ROAD, WILTON, TO
WESTWOOD ST. THOMAS SCHOOL, SALISBURY -
REQUEST FOR FREE SCHOOL TRANSPORT

Purpose of Report

1. To present further proposals, in response to local concerns, regarding an alternative shorter walking route for pupils from Wilton who attend Westwood St. Thomas School in Salisbury.

Background

2. Pupils attending Westwood St. Thomas School are of the age group 13-16 years. For this age group, free transport is available through the County Council's policy if the pupil lives three miles or more from their designated school (measured by the shortest available walking route). The distance from the furthest house in Fairview Road, Wilton, is under three miles from the school.
3. For pupils living under that distance, free transport is available if the County Council considers that the walking route to school is unsafe. The route is assessed by two officers and, if the parent disagrees with that decision, the route is assessed by the Road Safety Officer. If this decision is still contested, Members are asked whether they wish to uphold the Road Safety Officer's decision or to walk the route themselves before reaching a conclusion.
4. In 1992, applications for transport from Fairview Road were refused by Officers after two separate assessments found the route to be "*unquestionably*" safe for a child accompanied by a responsible adult. However, free transport for Fairview Road pupils was granted subsequently after an appeal to the former Transport Panel: the decision may have been influenced though by an alleged lack of a suitable bus stop as a reason why transport should have been provided (although it transpired later that this information was incorrect).
5. Since that time, the assessment guidelines have been updated to include the prescriptive definitions of a safe walking route written by the Local Authority Road Safety Officers' Association.
6. In line with the practices of Best Value, this County Council reviews its decisions from time to time, and under the current guidelines this walking route is considered safe. This view was endorsed by the local Road Safety Officer.

7. In June 2000, parents of pupils in Fairview Road were notified that free passes would not be available from September 2001 onwards. This gave 15 months notice that fares would have to be paid if pupils travelled on the bus (although no period of notice is required in such instances).
8. At the meeting of the Environmental Services Sub-Committee on 5th September 2001, Members were asked if they wished to uphold the Road Safety Officer's decision that the route is safe to walk, or to walk the route themselves. The Sub-Committee resolved:-
 - (i) *To note the Road Safety Officer's assessment of the route;*
 - (ii) *To note the availability of a commercially-operated school bus service between Wilton roundabout and Westwood St. Thomas School;*
 - (iii) *To take account of any representations made to them by the appellants concerning any financial difficulties which payment of fares would place upon them;*
 - (iv) *To defer a decision pending further information on cost-effective improvements which could be made to increase the safety and suitability of an alternative and shorter route utilising Penning Road.*

The Current Situation

9. Since then, each of the parents involved in this issue has been contacted individually to invite them to have their case considered further if payment of fares would place them in financial difficulties. No such requests have been received. During a live radio interview in January 2002 when parents raised the profile of this issue, this offer was made again, but no appeals have been received.
10. As detailed below, considerable progress has been made on the alternative shorter walking route identified in Penning Road. A map showing the location of this route is attached at **Appendix 1**.
11. The current situation, therefore, is that parents are making their own arrangements for pupils to get to school, either walking or paying to use the bus. The present walking route is considered to be safe and this report details below a shorter alternative walking route and it is envisaged this will provide another safe route for accessing the school.

Penning Road

12. Having listened to the concerns of Fairview Road residents that their children would have to walk 2.9 miles to school (if they chose not to use the bus), a potential alternative shorter walking route was identified. This track leads directly to the school, but it is owned by Wilton Estates.

13. Although pupils have been noted using the track, an upgrading of the surface and provision of lighting would be required before this could be considered a suitable walking route. Wilton Estates have given permission for this upgrading to be carried out by the County Council. Crossing facilities will be included as part of the provision of bus lanes along the A36, which is proposed as a separate project. This project is in the approved Plan, and finance for this has been agreed.
14. It should be noted that the A36 is a trunk road and so the County Council is not the Highways Authority for this, and is therefore limited in its powers to enhance this stretch of road.
15. The effect of using this upgraded track as a recognised walking route is that pupils from the Wilton area will have nearly a mile less to walk, if they choose not to use the bus, and this route could be used by all residents to improve local access.
16. The upgrading of the track will be completed for the start of the new Academic Year in September 2003.

Conclusion: Options Considered

17. In the opinion of the local Road Safety Officer, the current walking route from Wilton is safe to walk. However, if parents still have any concerns about this then the County Council can remind them that it is their duty, in law, to accompany their children "*.....as necessary, on their way to school, or to find another responsible adult to do so.*" If parents are unable to do this, then the County Council can point to the existence of a public bus service which runs to the school.

Recommendation

18. That the action taken to make available a shorter alternative safe walking route for pupils from Wilton who walk to Westwood St Thomas School be noted. When the upgrading of this track has been completed, Members will be asked either to endorse the Road Safety Officer's view that the walking route to the school is safe, or to walk the route themselves and make a decision thereon.

Reason for Recommendation

19. Improved access to local amenities will benefit all local residents as well as encouraging walking to school.

RICHARD J. LANDER

Director of Environmental Services

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report:

None

Environmental impact of the Recommendations contained in this Report:

These proposals represent a positive contribution towards alternative ways of improving local access.