

West Lothian Council to consult on Spaces for People measures and failings of 20mph zones

A “full and engaging consultation” into the failings of new 20mph zones and the Spaces for People (SfP) programme is to be carried out by West Lothian Council

A composite motion agreed by the Conservatives and the SNP group was voted through after an ill-tempered debate, five hours into a meeting of the council.

A Labour amendment suggesting the immediate removal of the 20mph speed limits imposed last year was castigated by opposition as “making the same mistake all over again”.

The amendment also recommended that council officers consult within all nine wards and take findings back to local area committees.

The SfP roll-out has been slated for its lack of public consultation, and it is clear that there has been a lack of understanding of what was going to come with this agreement. The fallout has rumbled through the council corridors since last autumn.

A detailed motion put forward by Whitburn Tory councillor,

Bruce Fairbairn, said a report to the council on the SFP project earlier this year: "confirmed the project had been bad for the county and had never been properly thought through, ie completely mismanaged by this administration".

It detailed specific failures covering the imposition of 20mph zones, signage and physical distance measure which increased the size of bus stop areas, often taking up narrow roads.

Cllr Diane Calder for the SNP said: "The Labour amendment is basically saying that they are looking to remove to 20mph and 40mph zones. Most councillors are just asking for consultation, and this has been the biggest problem.

"Neither the local councillors nor the population have been consulted in any manner of means. I appreciate there were time limits on it but within these time limits surely the councillors, who at least know their own areas, could have made a contribution to what they think was going to be effective or not effective in their areas."

SNP group leader Cllr Janet Campbell said the suggestion of removal: "is making same mistake all over again. What's being asked for is consultation with the communities we represent. What didn't happen before was proper and through consultation.

"Some communities we represent would be more than happy for these signs to remain, but for many more this has been a disaster."

Cllr Cathy Muldoon defending the amendment, suggested that thorough consultation could only be done through the local area committees. "What works for Bathgate won't work for Armadale or Fauldhouse", said Cllr Muldoon.

"We have been hearing a lot about meaningful consultation. We need nine different consultations because one size doesn't fit all."

There were angry exchanges between Cllr Kirsteen Sullivan and Cllr Boyle who interrupted the deputy leader as she tried to address the meeting. He was ordered to be quiet by the chair, Provost Tom Kerr.

Railing against "the misogyny that had been pretty strong today", she thanked Provost Kerr "for allowing the woman to speak."

That did not deter Cllr Boyle who continued to interrupt, attempting to raise points of order and questioning the protocol of the meeting, as he had reserved the right to speak by seconding the motion.

Cllr Sullivan criticised the "continual deflection" of opponents citing that all parties had agreed to the SfP measures and the details of the initial surveys when they came before council in June last year.

"I find it a bit rich that people are trying to backtrack on decisions made. Let's all be accountable rather than backtrack when you don't like what's come back at you," she added.

Calling on support for the motion Cllr Fairbairn said that what councillors, and anyone listening, must realise is "that local authorities of tomorrow will bear no resemblance to those of today."

He added: "Expectations are higher, funding is tighter."

He said it was no longer acceptable to reach the bar. Local authorities, to be successful, had to raise the bar higher.

"We have to forge working relationships. That is relations that work with communities. We need to work together with our communities, our statutory bodies and each other. We have the opportunity to raise the bar. Let's not waste that."

The motion stating "Council therefore resolves to carry out a

full and engaging consultation that will form a meaningful expectation of what is required by our communities” was voted through by 14 to 11.

by Stuart Somerville

Local Democracy Reporter

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