

Report to: Communities Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 30th November 2017

Lead Member/Officer: Leader/Traffic, Parking and Road Safety Manager

Report Author: Traffic, Parking and Road Safety Manager

Title: Tourist Direction Signs for the Vale of Clwyd

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1 The report is about the ongoing project to develop a tourist direction signing scheme for the Vale of Clwyd and to explain the process of applying for tourist direction signs on the trunk road network generally.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

- 2.1 Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group requested that an update be provided on the Vale of Clwyd project and that information be provided about the application process generally so that the Committee may understand the potential for the expansion to the scheme to include other trunk roads.
- 2.2 In accordance with the request from the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group, an invite was sent to the Welsh Government's Network Management Division to request that they send a representative to attend the Committee meeting to answer questions about the application process. Unfortunately, this request was declined.

3. What are the Recommendations?

- That the Committee:
- 3.1 considers the progress to date on the Vale of Clwyd tourist direction signing project and provides comments regarding the proposals; and
- 3.2 acknowledges the Welsh Government's eligibility criteria for providing brown tourist signs on trunk roads, and provides comments.

4. Report details

Introduction

- 4.1 Tourist direction signs are brown signs, with white text, used to direct drivers on the final stages of their journey to a Tourist Destination.
- 4.2 Tourist Destinations are classed as either Tourist Attractions or Tourist Facilities.
- 4.3 Tourist Attractions are places of interest that are open to the public and which generally offer recreational, historic or educational interest. This definition includes castles, zoos, theme parks, museums, theatres and golf courses to name just some.

- 4.4 Tourist Facilities generally include accommodation and places to eat.
- 4.5 As with all traffic direction signs, the principle is to provide the minimum amount of signs required in order for drivers to safely navigate to their destination. The basis for this is to reduce clutter and to avoid “overloading” drivers with too much information.
- Responsibility for approving tourist direction signs
- 4.6 In Wales, the Welsh Government (WG) is the highway authority for the trunk road network. This means they are directly responsible for the A55, (plus other trunk roads in Denbighshire such as the A494 and A5). Welsh Government approval is required in order to erect brown tourist signs on the A55. This approval process involves several stages and needs to be sought in advance of the physical signing works taking place.
- 4.7 Other than the trunk road network, Denbighshire County Council is the highway authority for the rest of the road network in Denbighshire. The Council is, therefore, responsible for approving any tourist direction signs on the rest of the road network.
- Eligibility for tourist direction signs on trunk roads
- 4.8 The Welsh Government published their brown tourist sign policy in 2013, titled “*Traffic Signs for Tourist Destinations on Trunk Roads and Motorways in Wales*”. A copy of this document is provided in Appendix A. The policy specifies the types of tourist attraction that may be signed off the trunk road network, and other criteria that must be met such as the minimum number of annual visitors.
- 4.9 Applying the Welsh Government’s policy criteria to the A55, only attractions located within 10 miles of the A55 and with a minimum of 60,000 annual visitors are eligible. Other criteria that apply are that the attraction must be recognised by *Visit Wales*, must be accredited to the *Visit Wales Quality Assurance Scheme* (or similar).
- 4.10 One of the key principles that the Welsh Government apply in regard to tourist direction signing is that an attraction can only be signed from the nearest trunk road.
- Cost and funding of tourist direction signs
- 4.11 Tourist direction signing schemes are generally expensive when they include signs on high-speed trunk roads such as the A55. One of the main reasons for this is the sheer size of signs that are required in order that they can be read by drivers at a sufficient distance away. The costs of signs also include the costs of the posts, foundations, temporary traffic management (e.g. cones) and, often, safety barrier.
- 4.12 Tourist direction sign projects are wholly funded by the operator(s) of the Tourist Destination(s) and this is standard convention across the UK. These costs will normally include scheme preparation costs as well as the actual physical works.
- Vale of Clwyd Tourist Direction Signs
- 4.13 In late 2014, a working group was established by Ann Jones AM to try and progress a tourist direction signing scheme for the Vale of Clwyd and was made up of representatives from Denbighshire County Council, Denbigh Town Council, Rhuddlan Town Council, Ruthin Town Council, St Asaph City Council, CADW, the

Diocese of St Asaph and officers from the Council's Traffic Section and Economic and Business Development Team.

- 4.14 Initially it had been difficult to find a way of signing the Vale of Clwyd in a manner which complied with the Welsh Government's tourist sign policy. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, as defined by the Welsh Government's guidelines, the Vale of Clwyd is not a Tourist Attraction in itself because it is an area rather than a specific attraction. Secondly, none of the Vale of Clwyd Tourist Attractions being considered for signing met the minimum requirement of 60,000 annual visitors. A solution was found, however, which was to group together attractions under the title "Vale of Clwyd" as indicated in the sign arrangement shown in Appendix B. Also, when grouped together, the combined visitor numbers exceeded the 60,000 threshold.
- 4.15 Following discussion at the Working Group, it was decided that the following three attractions would be included on the Vale of Clwyd sign:
- i) Denbigh Castle
 - ii) Rhuddlan Castle
 - iii) St Asaph Cathedral
- 4.16 It had originally been planned to also include Ruthin Gaol on the A55 sign but, following discussions with the Welsh Government, we were advised that this attraction could not be included because, firstly, it is more than 10 miles from the Denbighshire section of the A55 and, secondly, because the A55 is not the nearest trunk road to Ruthin Gaol, (the A494 is the closest trunk road).
- 4.17 The likely total cost of the project is estimated at £153,000. At the Working Group, the principle was established that the relevant Town/City Councils and attraction operators (CADW and the Diocese of St Asaph) would fund the cost of the actual physical signing works which are estimated to cost £130,000. In turn, it was agreed that Denbighshire County Council would fund all the scheme development, design, administrative and contractor supervision costs, (estimated at £23,000).
- 4.18 Officers worked in conjunction with officials at both CADW and the Diocese of St Asaph to submit the initial applications for the principle of signing the above attractions of the A55. This approval was granted in 2016.
- 4.19 The next stage of the project was to develop an outline signing scheme for approval which shows the proposed locations of new signs, plus amendments to existing signs that are required in order to physically accommodate the new signs. This scheme has been submitted and subsequently approved by the Welsh Government.
- 4.20 We are now at the stage where the detailed design work has just commenced. This work will include the design and material specification for the signs, plus the structural design of the posts and foundations. Once complete, this work will also require approval from the Welsh Government.
- 4.21 A more accurate cost estimate is currently being produced and this cost will be needed for the next meeting of the Working Group so that further discussions may take place about funding by the operators and Town/City Councils.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

It contributes towards the Corporate Priority, “Environment” and specifically the action to “Raise the profile of the County as a location to visit, in order to capitalise on Denbighshire’s economic potential”.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

6.1 The costs to design, develop and administer the project are being met from the Planning and Public Protection revenue budget and are estimated at £23,000.

6.2 The principle established by the Working Group is that the cost of the physical works (estimated at £130,000), i.e. sign manufacture and installation; posts; foundations; temporary traffic management; and safety barriers will be wholly met by contributions from the affected Town/City Councils and operators of the tourist attractions.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

A Well-being Impact Assessment has not been provided on the basis that the purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Vale of Clwyd tourist direction signing scheme, whilst providing general information about the tourist direction sign application process for trunk roads and associated eligibility criteria.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

The Working Group contains representatives of Town/City Councils plus County Councillors from the relevant geographical areas.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

The service has confirmed that the £23k investment required from DCC can be delivered within existing service budgets. It is important that this monitored carefully. On this basis the proposal can be supported.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

The only remaining significant risk to the project is if the Town/City Councils and tourist attraction operators are not able to contribute the necessary funds. Should this occur then the project would be unable to progress further until, if and when, sufficient funds are identified.

11. Power to make the Decision

Scrutiny’s powers in relation to this matter are outlined in Sections 7.4.1 and 7.15.2 of the Council’s Constitution.

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