

Burton and Dalby Parish Council

January 2024 A606 Burton Road Closure: Lessons Learned

Background

As part of the construction of the North and East Melton Mowbray Distributor Road (NEMMDR) the A606 Burton Road was closed for a three-week period from 8 to 28 January 2024. The closure was required to safely undertake the installation of new BT infrastructure and new drainage across the A606 as part of the new roundabout construction.

Communications

The closure first came to public attention when Melton Borough (MBC) Councillor Child alerted parish councillors to the NEMMDR December update published by the Highway Authority (Leicestershire County Council (LCC)) and Galliford Try (the principal contractor(GT)) on Monday 4 December 2023. A meeting of parish councillors was arranged for that evening and the following day Burton and Dalby Parish Council (PC) issued a press release. It called for the closure to be cancelled and predicted chaos on local roads. The press release was sent to local media outlets plus LCC, GT, local MBC and LCC councillors including the leaders of both councils, and the MP. The press release became front page news in the 7 December edition of the Melton Times.

The news generated considerable local concern and the 20 December 2024 meeting of the PC was attended by 12 members of the public raising issues relating to the closure. The meeting was also attended by MBC and LCC local councillors.

In response, a public meeting was arranged for the following evening at Burton Lazars Village Hall, which was attended by parish borough and county councillors, GT and LCC representatives and around 100 residents. The meeting was reported in the Melton Times online on 22 December- "The mood was a mixture of anger and worry at how this is being handled. The county council treated the people with contempt." "The residents are very angry but the county council unfortunately came to the meeting with the attitude of 'this is happening regardless of what is said during the meeting'...They also let slip that there will be a further closure in the summer that will likely be around six weeks in duration, so you can imagine that went down really well."

At the meeting, LCC/GT agreed a series of action points, including the publication of a regular progress update during the closure period. These were published on 30 December with updates on 8, 15 and 22 January. The Parish Council circulated these via social media.

Around 22 December, residents started to receive letters from LCC/GT regarding the closure. Many of the households most affected did not receive the letter.

LCC offices closed over the Christmas holiday period 23 December 2023 to 2 January 2024.

On 28 December 2023, the Melton Times advertised a LCC public notice announcing the closure of Sawgate Lane near Sawgate Lodge from 22 January 2024. On 15 January, Severn Trent confirmed the closure for up to 3 days.

On 6 January 2024, LCC announced a Temporary Traffic Regulation Order:

- A temporary 40mph from Gartree Hill Road to Melton Road (Burton and Dalby Parish);

- Temporary 30mph on Gartree Hill Road, Little Dalby Road, Woodgate Hill (Burton and Dalby Parish);
- Temporary 7.5 tonne weight restriction on Cross Lane, Hollow Lane, New Road, Sawgate Road (Burton and Dalby Parish);
- Sawgate Lane and Cuckoo Hill (Freeby Parish).

Before, during and after the closure, residents made contact with elected representatives, LCC and GT with closure related concerns.

There was misreporting of the closure on satnav systems, Google, one.network etc.

On 25 January, the Melton Times reported the re-opening of the A606 Burton Road.

Diversion Routes

The closure took place on 8 January against a background of adverse weather conditions and major flooding incidents.

The advertised diversion routes were as follows:

- Traffic from the North A46 & Nottingham heading South to Oakham/Stamford diverted via A46 > A52 > A1 > A606 for Stamford/Rutland and Oakham;
- Traffic from the South heading North diverted via the A1 > A607 for Melton and A1 > A52 for Nottingham;
- Traffic from Melton diverted via the A607 to the A1 to head South;

Local residents and businesses were never going to follow a diversion route that required an additional 50+ mile journey taking longer than 90 minutes. Instead, informal diversion routes were expected to be used:

- From A606 Burton Lazars to B676 Saxby Road via Sawgate Road and Stapleford Road (Sawgate Road Route);
- From A606 Oakham Road to B6047, Great Dalby via Little Dalby (Little Dalby Route);
- From A606 Oakham Road to B676 Saxby Road via Whissendine Road, Cuckoo Hill and Stapleford Road (Whissendine Road Route).

On 4 January 2024, parish councillors met representatives of LCC/GT and toured the routes pointing out accident blackspots and general issues regarding road conditions. It was apparent that LCC was unaware of Sawgate Road as a potential local diversion route.

During the first week of the diversions, weight limit signs, speed restriction signs and cones were installed on the unofficial diversion routes. These routes were also placed on gritting schedules.

From the outset, speed restrictions and weight limits on these routes were largely ignored. Further, during the closure there were several incidents affecting the informal diversion routes:

- Sawgate Road was impassable following flooding and fallen tree incidents;
- The Little Dalby Route was closed on 17 January for Severn Trent emergency repairs
- The Little Dalby Route became blocked on 12 January owing to participants and spectators at a hunt meet.

Three accidents were known to have been reported during the closure period on the local diversion routes:

- Damaged wall at Hollow Lane, Burton Lazars on 16 January;

- Car crash on Little Dalby Route attended by ambulance on 21 January;
- Local resident clipped by a car wing mirror as it avoided an oncoming HGV in Little Dalby.

Additional police patrols took place within the villages and along the local diversion routes. Local police report that the majority kept to the speed and weight limits.

The Little Dalby route was particularly badly affected by the closure. This route was usually only used by around 600 vehicles per day, but was subject to large volumes of traffic throughout the closure. The narrow lanes are not wide enough for two-way traffic and certainly not for HGVs. The verges soon became deeply rutted and road signs damaged, and drains blocked. Repairs have not been undertaken.

The A606 remained open for pedestrians and cyclists alongside the roadworks but was unlit until a temporary lighting system was installed early on during the closure period.

HGVs

From the outset the weight limit restrictions were ignored by many HGV drivers. The traffic marshals monitoring the diversion routes had no powers to stop and direct drivers and were largely ignored and abused. The traffic marshals were stood down soon after the first week of closure. Leicestershire police were informed of HGVs not adhering to weight restrictions and reporting arrangements were advertised.

On 16 January, NEMMDR construction vehicles ignored the weight restrictions and passed through Burton Lazars.

The number of HGVs using the route appeared to grow the longer the diversion was in place, with drivers and operators becoming increasingly aware of the alternative routes.

Community Impact

Buses were re-routed and the Burton Lazars services were suspended. For residents of Burton Lazars, Leicestershire County Council provided a temporary replacement taxi service to and from Melton Mowbray once a day at 11:10 with a return at 13:25 which had to be booked in advance.

Tesco cancelled home deliveries to Burton Lazars during the closure.

Burton Lazars Village Hall reported cancelled bookings and lost revenue.

No information was provided on emergency service access.

Various residents offered lifts to help with hospital appointments, school runs, food deliveries, prescription collection etc.

Tess Lincoln arranged for a 'pop-up' village shop in Burton Lazars selling everyday essentials that was open throughout the closure.

A pop-up pizza van visited Burton Lazars Village Hall on 24 January.

Conclusions

- The formal A606 Burton Road diversion route was unacceptably long, forcing drivers to use shorter, informal routes on unsuitable roads. LCC was unprepared for the impact on local diversion routes.
- For many, LCC/GT's reasons for the closure were unconvincing and lacked credibility.

- The timing of the closure was poor as it was always likely that poor weather conditions would compound problems.
- The notice period given to local residents and businesses was too short, especially given the festive period, allowing little time for people to prepare. Not everyone was informed.
- Weight and speed limits were frequently ignored. The problems became worse the longer the closure was in place.
- It was unacceptable for NEMMDR construction vehicles to ignore the weight restrictions and avoid the formal diversion route. It is evident that HGV operators and drivers considered the formal diversion routes too long.
- Traffic marshalling was ineffective and there were no alternative plans to manage and enforce speed and weight limits.
- Coordination with other organisations whose operations impact on traffic, particularly Severn Trent, was a shambles. Other local road closures were poorly managed.
- LCC took no account of the impact the closure would have on the local community. Travel costs and journey times increased, community services were suspended, revenue was lost, appointments cancelled, those with care needs were not considered.
- The local community was not confident about emergency service response times during the closure.
- The arrangements to replace the bus service were inadequate.
- The community response to the closure was admirable. People volunteered to help those left abandoned by the closure. The pop-up shop and pizza van were particularly successful.
- Social media was particularly important in letting people know what was happening, but not everyone has access.
- Regular progress updates were informative.
- For many, the responses of our MP and local county councillor to community concerns were weak.
- If it wasn't for the leadership of the Parish Council early on, the impact on the local community would have been worse.
- The performance of LCC officers was mixed but the GT Press Officer was particularly responsive and reliable, even out of hours.
- Repairs to damaged roads, highway verges, drainage and traffic signs have not been made.
- The plans for the longer, summer closure remain unknown.

Overall, the closure was poorly planned and executed. LCC has failed to take responsibility for its actions.

Recommendations:

With a longer closure anticipated this summer, it is important that the following recommendations are agreed by LCC/GT:

1. The NEMMDR project plan should be published as it gets updated to provide advance notice of potential closures.
2. Road closures need clear justification with an explanation of why alternatives have been rejected.
3. A full risk assessment should be undertaken to include alternative routes, arrangements for pedestrians and cyclists, emergency services and community impact.

4. The whole of the community affected should be given a minimum of a six-week notice of major road closures.
5. A pre-closure event with local representatives, Severn Trent, emergency services etc. should be held with a closure plan prepared and published. The Parish Council is prepared to host this.
6. The planning, coordination and communication of roadworks, particularly with Severn Trent, must improve if future closures are to operate effectively and with public confidence.
7. LCC should compensate those affected by the closure and support the community response.
8. Arrangements for cancelled bus services need improvement.
9. Planned closures should take account of prevailing conditions.
10. The management and enforcement of local speed and weight limits must significantly improve. For example, Automatic Number Plate Recognition cameras can provide for 24/7 monitoring and capture images of any vehicle that use the bridge in contravention of the weight and speed restrictions.
11. A 24hr hotline should be set-up to deal with community concerns and events during the closure period.
12. Information and publicity about the closure should utilise social media platforms but recognise that this is not available to all.
13. The Parish Council and local community have invaluable local knowledge and are willing to respond positively. LCC/GT should be more welcoming to their involvement in closure planning.