



Janine Richards  
Assistant Coroner  
Coroners Office  
Civic Centre  
North Terrace  
CROOK  
DL15 9ES

04 May 2023

Dear Madam

I refer to your report dated 13 March 2023 made pursuant to Regulation 28 of the Coroners (Investigations) Regulations 2013 (“the Report”). The Report was made following the inquest into the death of Kelly Nicola DUNNE, who died on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2022, which concluded was as a result of fatal head injuries sustained as a result of a road traffic collision on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2022. The circumstances of the collision being identified as driver error when the deceased pulled out of a side road, Pittington Road, into the path of a vehicle travelling in the outside lane of the A690.

The Council notes the Report indicates that you consider there is a risk that further deaths could occur on the A690 unless action is taken. You have indicated you believe that action should be taken to prevent further deaths and that the Council has the power to take such action. The Council is under a duty to respond to the report setting out what action it has taken (or proposes to take together with a proposed timetable) or provide an explanation as to why no action is proposed.

As you will be aware the A690 at this location is a dual carriageway and serves as a strategic east/west route linking Durham to Sunderland, A1M / A19, with a number of minor side road junctions along its length and carries a significant number of vehicles daily (A690 25,000, Pittington Lane 4,000 and Lambton View 5,000). The junction in question is a standard layout across Durham and the wider national network. The section of A690, in the vicinity of the junctions, is designed to national speed limit standards and affords good sightlines however, due to the junction configurations, a lower limit of 50mph has been implemented. Historical speed data for the shows an average speed of 49 mph so drivers are complying with the posted speed limit. Unfortunately, there will always be a small percentage of drivers who drive at an inappropriate speed, and this happens regardless of the posted limit.

**Chief Executive**

Durham County Council, County Hall, Durham, DH1 5UF  
Main Telephone (03000) 26 00000

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A speed limit is an absolute maximum, and it is the driver's responsibility to drive at a speed suitable to the environment and conditions. It is an intention of the Department for Transport guidance to ensure that speed limits are credible with the aim that they become self-evident and self-enforcing, by virtue of their surroundings. A limit lower than the current posted limit would not be credible or appropriate and would likely result in a significant proportion of motorists ignoring the limit. In addition, the imposition of non-credible lower limits can raise expectations that the speeds of vehicles will be reduced but seldom realised in practice, resulting in greater danger with drivers making decisions based on incorrect assumptions, and also unfair criticism of the police who have to enforce the speed limits.

With regard to section 6 of your report I can confirm we will continue to carry out our duty under Section 39 of The Road Traffic Act 1988 'to carry out studies into accidents arising out of the use of vehicles and, in the light of those studies, take such measures as appear to the authority to be appropriate to prevent such accidents'.

When considering the need for road safety solutions, each scenario is analysed and prioritised accordingly, in the context of a Durham County road network of 3792km, with 2920 recorded personal injury accidents over a 5 year period (2018-2022) and, of those, approximately 32% were serious or fatal injury. It is appreciated that the circumstances surrounding every accident can be very emotive and in most cases, there can be demands for engineering measures to be implemented.

We, like other Authorities, use a prioritised approach utilising the personal injury accident database. By using this database, it helps inform the decision-making process using factual data gained during Police investigations from each accident. It also helps identify accident profiles which may be suitable for consideration of engineering measures. We also consult with Durham Constabulary Traffic Management Officers for their input. Prior to the most recent accident there had been 6 accidents in the previous 5 years giving the site an annual average of 1.2 accidents per year, which was highlighted by our AIP team during their cluster analysis in the 22/23 financial year. However, given that the annual average accident total was remaining the same and, on the understanding that the impending traffic signals scheme was in development, it was considered that no further action was warranted in terms of AIP intervention.

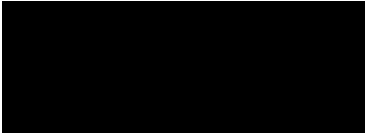
The impending traffic signals schemes in the area has been developed as part of a new housing development in West Rainton, where the developer was required to submit a Transport Assessment (TA) as part of their proposed housing development at the planning application stage. The TA details the impact on local traffic and transport that the development is likely to have and, in some cases, offers mitigation measures. When the TA was appraised for the development, volumes generated by the proposed housing development and future expected traffic growth were used to model the impact that it will likely have on the highway network caused by additional trip generation.

Appraisal of the TA established that the West Rainton junction would be over capacity as the development became occupied and mitigation measures were required to alleviate traffic pressures. For this reason, a planning condition was placed on the developer to install traffic lights at the West Rainton location only upon occupancy of the 39th dwelling, and the impacts on the Pitlington Road / A690 junction were assessed as being negligible. However, the Council took the opportunity to maximise improvements around this junction and made the decision to improve the Pitlington Road / A690 junction in tandem with the West Rainton junction, using central government funding via the Local Transport Plan.

Whilst the planning approval included the 'trigger' for signal installation, officers have worked closely with the developer and have successfully secured the necessary funding to allow the signal installation to be brought forward and a scheme to implement signal control at both the West Rainton and Pittington Lane junctions is programmed to commence 2<sup>nd</sup> May for approximately 14 weeks.

I trust the above satisfies section 7 of your report.

Yours faithfully,



Chief Executive Officer