

# Blind Laura begs again: “Put in pelican crossing”

A BLIND Caldicot woman pleaded with council officers to install a pelican crossing so she can safely walk to the town centre after two years of waiting.

Laura Wilson, 22, took to her feet during a Caldicot Town Council meeting to

demand the crossing be given priority because the road is currently too dangerous even for a guide dog.

Her plea was directed at Monmouthshire County Council officers Roger Hoggins and Mark Youngman who compiled a

preliminary draft of safe routes in communities – the scheme providing money for the pelican crossing requested by Miss Wilson.

She said she was already nearing the last stage of her guide dog training but was unlikely to be given a

dog until a pelican crossing was installed on Chepstow Road.

The existing traffic island between The Cross and The White Hart pubs is too small, leaving her unable to cross from her Priory Close home to the town centre.

She said: “Last time you said it would be a top priority but I don’t think so. I don’t know if I can put up with it for much longer.”

Councillors backed Miss Wilson with Cllr David Ashwin repeatedly calling on Mr Hoggins, head of property and contract services, and transport policy officer Mr Youngman to prioritise the crossing before September.

Mr Hoggins said money

was available and he would look at putting the pelican crossing in before next month as long as it did not compromise the rest of the scheme, which will take longer to complete.

When pressed he also agreed to write to Miss Wilson with updates on the situation so she could keep the Guide Dog Association informed.

Mr Hoggins added the money for the project had to be spent by spring next year.

Miss Wilson first requested a crossing two years ago but funding was only secured in April this year, after schools in Caldicot put together a travel plan submitted for funding from the Welsh Assembly.



Laura Wilson, who is has seemingly won her two-year battle for a pelican crossing on Chepstow Road

# 'It's not safe to cross here'

A PEDESTRIAN crossing in Caldicot is not safe enough for visually impaired people, a guide dogs charity says.

Laura Wilson, who is registered blind, is campaigning for a pelican crossing to be installed near her home in the town.

The 20-year-old, who uses a white cane, feels unsafe using the existing traffic-island crossing in Sandy Lane, which gives motorists priority, near the junction with Newport Road.

Miss Wilson has made enquiries about getting a guide dog, but is worried the lack of a pedestrian crossing may hinder her application.

The Guide Dogs Association for the Blind said the crossing was not suitable for visually impaired people such as Miss Wilson to use on their own.

"There is a crossing with a small island in the middle of it, but we wouldn't expect this lady to use it independently," said Jim Powell, the charity's district manager for South Wales.

"A provision of controlled crossing would



Laura Wilson is calling for a pelican crossing in Caldicot

aid her mobility."

Miss Wilson, who began losing her sight at the age of five, said crossing the road on her own without the aid of a pelican crossing was "stressful" as she has to listen out for traffic.

In addition, if she is given a guide dog, she believes the traffic-island crossing would be too narrow for herself and the dog.

"It would be much easier with a traffic-light

crossing," said Miss Wilson, who lives with a full-time carer in Priory Close.

Miss Wilson raised the issue at a meeting of Caldicot town council last week, where members agreed to lobby Monmouthshire council's highways department.

A spokeswoman for Monmouthshire council said officers would look into the possibility of upgrading the crossing.

# Long wait for crossing

A BLIND Caldicot woman will have to wait another year before the introduction of a pelican crossing, first agreed two years ago, to the busy road near her house.

At the moment the road is considered too dangerous for a guide dog and so 22-year-old Laura Wilson must cross alone if she wants to venture out of her Priory Close home.

The delayed crossing will eventually let Miss Wilson cross the road in safety – and could qualify her for a guide dog.

Miss Wilson says it is unlikely she will be given a dog until the crossing is installed because the current traffic islands on Chepstow Road are too small and are considered dangerous.

She first requested the crossing two years ago.

Funding was only secured in April this year and Monmouthshire County Council's transport policy officer Mark Youngman said the crossing is not expected to be completed until spring 2010. Miss Wilson, who lost her sight aged five currently, crosses the busy road by listening for traffic at the crossing between The Cross and The White Hart pubs.

She will meet with MCC officers to discuss her predicament next week.

She said: "It's quite hard crossing the road. It does scare me, it's dangerous. I have to use it to get to the shops."

She added: "It's not just for my benefit. It's for those with pushchairs and in wheelchairs as well."

"Wheelchairs are half on the road and half on the island and it's the same with the buggies."

Cllr David Ashwin said: "We need a pelican crossing down there. We've asked for this to be given priority."



Once approved, it will take around six weeks for Miss Wilson, whose blindness is thought to be due to the genetic disorder Laurence-Moon Bardet-Biedl Syndrome, to be trained

with a guide dog. She currently lives with carers but one day hopes to live by herself.

Mr Youngman said: "We understand that residents are keen to see a cross-

ing in Caldicot. "We are moving as quickly as we can to get it installed.

"We expect the work to be complete by spring 2010."

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**Laura Wilson, who was told she will have to wait for a crossing near her home**

## Crossing woe

THAT Laura Wilson is still having to wait for a pelican crossing to be introduced near her home two years after applying for one, is a sin.

What makes the situation worse is that the lack of the pelican crossing is preventing Ms Wilson from being allocated a guide dog. Apparently the road at the moment is considered too dangerous for a dog.

That should tell Monmouthshire council something about the usefulness of the current road crossing facility at the site.

Meanwhile a young woman who has been blind since the age of five is being denied the independence she wants and is having to cross a dangerous road by listening out for cars and taking her chance.

This is an appalling state of affairs which needs to be resolved with some urgency.