

Council July 2022

Item 9 St John's car park & Road Safety Issues

Background

May's Council meeting had the matter of St John's Carpark as Item 27 on its agenda. (Appendix 1 for excerpts of the May 2022 minutes)

Subsequently there have been meetings between WPC and the Conservators regarding charging at the carpark, and various representatives at a site meeting to discuss the road safety issues.

Next Steps

1. The Carpark

At the May Council meeting the Clerk was asked to investigate WPCs involvement in the car park in the late 1980s/early 1990s. The Clerk visited the archives to view WPC's minutes from that time. Appendix 2 below shows extracts of the minutes but to summarise:

- In 1988 WPC approached the Ashdown Forest Conservators (AFC) about making a carpark at St John's 'for people using the Ashdown Forest, and also for mothers of local children attending the local school'.
- AFC appears to have agreed to create and manage a car park, with financial assistance from WPC to create an access.
- WPC paid £1500 for the access works in November 1988
- Minutes relating to signage and potholes in January and November 1989 imply that responsibility for the carpark was with AFC

In June Cllrs Kelly and Tarling raised the carpark issue with AFC at a meeting. The following is an extract from the meeting:

"The AFC have not made a decision yet about implementing charges in the SJCP, as they are aware that there is already a substantial problem with parking and traffic in the area.

If the AFC decide to charge at SJCP then the AFC will take steps to reduce the impact of the charges – they may set up concessions for teachers at the school, and charges may not apply during pick up / drop off time.

This option has the potential impact of dog walkers parking at pick up / drop off time to avoid the charges elsewhere, and so adding to the number of cars at peak times.

If the AFC decide not to charge for parking at SJCP this has the potential impact of adding to the number of people using this car park, in order to avoid charges at the other AF car parks, which may increase the traffic issues.

AFC have met with interested parties; residents, Councillor Georgia Taylor, the local schools, and representatives from the Hoarder Centre.

The AFC will be attending a meeting on the afternoon of the 21st June relating to Road Safety in the area, and will make their decision taking into account the outcomes of that meeting."

The resident who attended the May Council meeting has written since the meetings to enquire:

"If Withyham PC were considering taking over the management/ maintenance of the car park they would unfortunately be doing so when the condition of the car park is not at it's best so it may need a jointly funded repair first?"

Another thought is that if this did happen - could signs be erected that restrict the use of the car park for the primary school, pre school and Church and Marden's Hill ward residents for set hours during the week to prevent the car park being overused by forest visitors (if they learn that this car park is free)? It could then be used by forest visitors at weekends and evenings?"

The Clerk flags up the following to Council:

- Costs – we do not know whether AFC would charge the Council to take over the carpark, and there would be maintenance costs both upfront and in the long-term maintenance (this may lead to an application for a Public Works Loan)
- The Car Park is currently in a poor state of repair
- Monitoring – would WPC have the resources to monitor the car park to ensure it is being used by the community rather than walkers? One of AFC's concerns about designating this as a free carpark was that walkers would use this one rather than other chargeable carparks
- Have the residents considered asking Wealden District Council if they would take on the car park as they run the free car parks in the district and have the budgets and expertise in running these.

Council is asked to consider whether it wishes to further explore the viability of WPC taking over the St John's carpark.

2. Road Safety Issues

The site meeting that took place to consider road safety issues at St John's Road/School Lane asked Cllr Obbard to make a request for £500 to pay East Sussex County Council to undertake feasibility study on the site. This would explore the possible solutions and, should any be viable, the Parish Council could apply under Community Match for East Sussex County Council to consider contributing up to 50% to the preferred works, to be undertaken by their contractors. Appendix 4 is an email from Cllr Obbard outlining the meeting.

Following a discussion to clarify some questions between the Assistant Clerk and Ian Johnson (IJ), the Safety Officer from East Sussex County Council, the following information is provided.

East Sussex County Council currently have no plans for works in this location and should the Parish Council wish to see works then Community Match would be the way forward. Ian also noted that there are other locations (i.e. areas with school traffic) in the Parish which may look for similar action by the Parish Council should this progress.

Possible options for this site would be:

1. Zebra Crossing
2. Crossing lights
3. Parking restrictions – IJ noted that without enforcement these are often ignored, and frequently just move the problem to a different location.
4. Lower speed limits.
5. Traffic Calming

Appendix 4 is an email from IJ to the resident and County Cllr Taylor with further information on options

Each of these options would need an individual feasibility study costing £500

The ballpark costings for each option, should a feasibility study show a need, would be:

1. Zebra Crossing £35,000+
(cost to Parish Council between £17,500 and £31,500 depending on Community Match)
2. Crossing lights £150,000+
(cost to Parish Council between £75,000 and £135,000 depending on Community Match)
3. Parking restrictions £3,000+
(cost to Parish Council between £1,500 and £2,700 depending on Community Match)
4. Lower speed limits. £10,000+
(cost to Parish Council between £5,000 and £9,000 depending on Community Match)
5. Traffic Calming - difficult to estimate as no proposed features are known at this stage

Council is asked to consider whether to proceed with any of the listed feasibility studies at St John's at a cost of £500 each. The Clerk notes that a commitment to a feasibility study could be perceived by residents as a future commitment by WPC to allocating funds for that project via Community Match, should the study be favourable.

Budgets

There is currently no precepted budget for the car park, road safety Feasibility Studies or Community Match funding. There is a precepted budget line 4421 'Road Safety Committee' which, since there is no longer a road safety committee, is utilised for the Highways Coordinator's mileage expenses. It started 2022/23 with £500 budgeted.

There is currently an Ear marked reserve for Road Safety projects of £3,000.

Overall, at the end of 2022/23 WPC will see its reserves lower than previous years due to the Post Office/Phoenix House project and Groombridge Playground replacement.

Appendix 1 – excerpt of the May 2022 WPC minutes

The minutes read...

There was one member of the public present in support of item 27. A paper had been provided by their neighbour, which had been circulated to Council, regarding concerns about the Ashdown Conservators' plans to charge for parking at the St John's car park and road safety around St John's School. The member of the public explained that she was representing residents of School Lane and Marden's Hill as well as St John's School and Preschool. The carpark had been built late 1980s/early 90s to alleviate congestion around the school and WPC had supported this. Since then the Preschool had started at the Reading Room, there is a new hall at St John's Church and the Horder Centre has grown including a public café and classes, so traffic and the need for parking has increased. In addition, residents and their visitors use the car park. The Conservators had met with the school, preschool, church and Horder Centre about their parking proposals but not with residents.

The resident explained that the car park is predominantly a community parking area and is well used by residents, their visitors and the local school, preschool and church users. Whilst the Conservators have said that they would allow free parking at drop off and pick up times, the staff at the school and preschool need to park all day. Residents would therefore like to see either the Conservators acknowledging that the St John's carpark is a community carpark and not charge for use of that carpark, or WPC taking it on to maintain it as a free community car park.

And

Further to the paper and the members of the public's presentation, councillors agreed that the preferred option would be for Ashdown Forest Conservators to exclude the St John's car park from parking charges in recognition of it being predominantly a community car park. This would likely be a less onerous option than part time exclusions anyway. Cllr Kelly would be meeting with the Conservators' CEO and offered to raise this.

There were concerns about committing WPC long term to maintaining the car park if it were to take responsibility from the Conservators. As the Council's money is public money it would have to be clear of the commitment.

Cllr Obbard had received an email from County Cllr Taylor with comments. She confirmed that she would seek further information on the Conservators' charging structure, she recommended the school considering more alternatives such as a walking bus or staggered start times, and confirmed that ESCC would be unlikely to be able to do much in terms of engineering. They might consider some action under the ESCC School Streets initiative. Cllr Taylor would be happy to facilitate a meeting for residents with the ESCC Road Safety Officer.

The Clerk was asked to ascertain whether records can be accessed to confirm WPCs involvement in the car park in the late 1980s/early 1990s.

Alternatively ESCC might have records. It would be useful to know whether there were any conditions or agreements relating to WPCs commitment to the car park.

The following actions were AGREED:

- Cllr Kelly to speak with the Conservators' CEO about them considering the St John's car park a community carpark and not charging
- Clerk to investigate WPCs involvement in the car park in the late 1980s/early 1990s, either through WPCs archives or in contact with ESCC

Appendix 2 – WPC minutes re St Johns Carpark 1988-89

February 1988

At this time WPC had a licence from the Ashdown Forest Conservators (AFC) for a 'recreation ground' which was behind Glenmore Road. At this meeting Cllr Nassau briefed Council that it was isolated, difficult to drain, making it unusable at times, and the pavilion had been vandalised.

The below extract of the minutes shows that she therefore proposed that the licence for that was relinquished and instead a licence taken by WPC for either the Reading Room land or 'the Tip' which could be made into a car park 'for people using the Ashdown Forest, and also for mothers of local children attending the local school'.

5.

safe environment for children to play in, and a sports pavilion on the site had been vandalized. Because of its secluded position and the problems with drainage Mrs. Nassau felt it would be more realistic to relinquish the licence on this piece of land and consider instead two other pieces of land, one outside St. John's Reading Room and one on the opposite side of the road known as 'The Tip'. Mrs. Nassau circulated plans of the sites involved for the benefit of the Parish Council. It was felt that the land in front of the St. John's Reading Room had great possibilities for development into an area of benefit to many more members of the community. Mrs. Nassau felt that the disused tip area could perhaps be used as a car park for people using the Ashdown Forest, and also for mothers of children attending the local school who at present had nowhere to park when collecting their children. After further discussion it was decided that local opinion should be canvassed and some idea of the expenditure involved be assessed before proceeding further. Mrs. Nassau welcomed Councillors to join her on a visit of the site.

DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Monday 14th March 1988 at 7.30 p.m. at the Groombridge Institute.

March 1988

At this meeting Cllr Nassau has not yet canvassed local opinion but had found initial reaction to be favourable, Council therefore agreed to approach the AFC for their reactions. Extract of minutes below:

REPORT ON ST. JOHN'S RECREATION GROUND PROJECT

Mrs. Nassau said that she had not yet canvassed local opinion but initial reaction had been favourable to her outline scheme. In particular, the sand quarry appeared to be an ideal site for a car park with suitable access. The next step was to approach the Conservators of Ashdown Forest for their reactions to the scheme. At the moment the path across the front of St. John's Reading Room was being used by motorists and the Clerk was instructed to write to St. John's Church and the local school pointing out that this is marginal land owned by Ashdown Forest and is for pedestrian use only. Mr. Wenham felt that local opinion should be canvassed thoroughly as to residents' reaction to the scheme. It was pointed out that the parish would not be losing the recreation ground as the conservators are obliged to provide this land and cannot legally reclaim it. However, the council may decide not to spend further money on maintaining it in future and to use the money saved to finance the upkeep of this new scheme. A copy of the feasibility study is to be sent to the Conservators for their reactions before further steps are taken by the council. Mr. Smithers wished it to be put on record his commendation of Mrs. Nassau in the preparation of her report, and felt that Councillor Hughes should also be sent a copy. It was agreed that the project should be sent to the Conservators for approval with one abstention.

April-May 1988

Minutes report that AFC were considering the proposal and the County Engineer was happy with the access to the proposed carpark. At the May meeting it states that a response was read out from the AFC and WPC needed to clarify some points (no detail of the response or points of clarification). The Clerk was instructed to relinquish the licence on the recreation Ground.

June 1988

Reported that AFC had agreed in principle to WPC having a licence for the Reading Room land. It was thought that AFC would be responsible for the installation of the car park but might ask for financial assistance from WPC. Extract of minutes below:

Council's behalf on this and other legal matters, should they is hoped to have a report from him at the next meeting.
St. John's Project. Mrs. Nassau said that the Ashdown Forest Conservators have agreed in principle to the restoration of the land in front of the Reading Room and that volunteers are ready and willing to undertake this work. There is to be a meeting on site to discuss further details with the Conservators. It is thought that the Conservators will be responsible for the installation of a new car park, but that they may ask the Council for some financial assistance. This could lead to the closing off of the tank road into the forest, which would help to avoid tipping in the forest and the occasional use by caravans. The Clerk was instructed to write to the Conservators requesting a licence for the land in front of the Reading Room so that work can be put in hand. Mr. Clay questioned the ownership of the land, and Mrs. Nassau promised to contact the church wardens to clarify the situation before work was undertaken.

July-September 1988

Minutes note that AFC would be meeting on 27 July and WPC agreed that further comments would not be made until the AFC proposals were known. September minutes note that AFC had referred the matter to their September Roadways Committee.

October 1988

Minutes note that a draft agreement had been received from AFC for the carpark and the reading Room land (no detail in the minutes and the agreement is not in files). Extract of minutes below:

monitored and to ask the police to ensure that the roads monitored were those most under pressure.
St. John's Project. Details of a draft agreement had been received from the Ashdown Forest Conservators relating to a proposed car park and the granting of a licence for land in front of the St. John's Reading Room. Mrs. Nassau said that the proposals were greeted with enthusiasm and that she was very grateful to the Conservators for their cooperation on this scheme. Because much of the clearing work and landscaping in front of the Reading Room is to be done by voluntary labour, it is possible that the time scale of work to be completed within six months of signing the agreement may prove difficult to meet, especially with the onset of the winter months. However, St. John's Ward councillors are looking into this urgently and in the meantime the Clerk will write to the Conservators explaining the current position. Commander Barker thanked Councillor Hughes for his help in putting the Parish Council's case to the Conservators. Various sources of funding for this project were discussed, including an appeal to Dr. Jaeger, and the Shell Better Britain campaign.

November 1988

WPC agrees £1,500 quote for works relating to the access to the carpark and that work should start immediately. Extract of minutes below:

Clerk was instructed to contact that a satisfactory survey was carried out. St. John's Project. Mrs. Nassau reported that good progress was being made on this project and that five estimates had been obtained relating to the access to the proposed Forest carpark, the top one being for £3000 and the lowest, from McNicholls Engineering being for £1500. This firm was working in this area at the moment and was willing to undertake the work at this price provided they could be authorised so to do immediately. Should the Parish Council feel unable to give its approval the cost of the work could be considerably more. The work involved tarmacing the entrance to the carpark in accordance with the County Engineer's specification. Mrs. Roach pointed out that although this was a large sum of money, the Parish Council was saving roughly £500 per annum now that mowing of the Recreation Ground had been discontinued in St. John's ward. Mrs. Nassau therefore proposed that the contractor be asked to start the work immediately and this proposal was carried unanimously. Mrs. Nassau said that a Licence for the land in front of the Reading Room be applied for forthwith so that voluntary labour could be organised to begin clearing the site. Copies of the draft lease were circulated to Councillors and Mrs. Nassau pointed out that work had to be completed within six months of the issue of the lease. Mr. Clay expressed concern about access to the Reading Room by elderly people who drive their cars right up to the Reading Room. After further discussion it was decided that the position should be clarified before the Licence was signed, and this will be reconsidered at the next meeting. Mrs. Roach enquired as to the cost of the lease and was informed it is a peppercorn rent.

December 1988

Minutes show £1,500 payment being made.

January 1989

Carpark is in use but WPC requests that AFC signposts it more clearly (implies responsibility for the carpark is with AFC). Extract of minutes below:

Association to become a registered
ST. JOHN'S PROJECT.
Mr. Haines reported that the St. John's car park is now in use but that the surface had not yet bedded down completely. Furthermore the car park was not visible from one approach and drivers were using one of the tank roads. Commander Barker agreed to ask the Conservators to signpost the car park more conspicuously, but said that it was already in use by parents of children attending St. John's School. It is hoped that work will start on the land in front of the St. John's Reading Room on Saturday, 4th February, at 10 a.m.* All volunteers will be most welcome.

November 1989

Minutes report that potholes have appeared in the access road to the car park and the Clerk is asked to contact AFC to request that repairs are made (implies responsibility for the carpark is with AFC). Extract of minutes below:

the proposed Boundary Changes as the effect within the Ward. The Clerk had received a standard acknowledgement, a letter relating to the handling of the Elim Court Gardens planning application, and as yet no response had been received to a request for a full investigation into procedures relating to letters received from the public. The Clerk was asked to pursue the matter further. Mrs. Jackson said that pot holes have appeared in the access to the St. John's car park and asked the Clerk to contact the Ashdown Forest Conservators to see if repairs could be done. Temporary traffic lights have been installed at the junction of Old Lane and

Appendix 3 – Report from Cllr Obbard on St Johns Road Safety meeting June 2022

On the afternoon of 21 June there was also a site visit to St John's to assess road safety issues. Cllr Obbard's email report from that meeting is:

In attendance; Keith Obbard, Ian Johnson, Georgia Taylor, Mark Infield, Julie Richardson, John Rogers, & Laura (headteacher).

ISSUES

PARKING in School Lane, obstructing drives, turning in drives, danger to children getting in and out of cars and using the pavement and residents using their drives.

Parking on double yellow lines in St Johns road, also pavement parking obscuring vision for children crossing the road.

Parking in the AF car park currently, which could be displaced onto the road when charges are introduced.

Parking all the way up St Johns road turns it into a single lane, slowing traffic but irritating drivers.

CHILD SAFETY for crossing the road near the pre-school. People use the nearest point to the junction, but further down the road would be better visibility. Parked cars exacerbate the problem.

The speed of traffic can also be a problem, but visibility is the main issue. NB cars parked further up the road slow the traffic.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

ROAD SIGNAGE could be improved with on road painted signs. Extending the double yellows to push parked cars away from the crossing point.

A proper PEDESTRIAN CROSSING, Zebra Crossing or Pelican Crossing, would make a massive improvement.

A "Lollipop Person" to control the children crossing would be a very good second-best.

Remembering that many of the children walk down from Crowborough Town.

An enlarged, reorganised and more available CHURCH CAR PARK would enable parents to drop off and pick up children on the right side of the road for the school, take many cars away from the danger areas near the pre-school/junction, and possibly avoid the conflict over the AF car park.

SCHOOL STREETS initiative. The ESCC is trialling the closure of streets outside schools at pick up & drop-off time under a government granted scheme.

REDUCED SPEED LIMITS for school lane to 30 or 20 mph and extension of 30 mph down Mardens Hill.

POTENTIAL DIFFICULTIES

A pedestrian crossing could only put in place where there is street lighting, so the cost of doing both those things is way beyond any realistic possibility, even if street lighting were acceptable to the Ashdown Forest and the residents, which it is not.

There used to be a "Lollipop Lady", but she retired and it has been impossible to recruit another one despite many attempts since.

Attempts to recruit Speed Watch volunteers who could monitor road drivers' behaviour has so far been unsuccessful.

Greater use of the Church Car park would put significant cost on to the Church, and although the School has a good relationship with the Church, there will probably be a limit to how far that can be pushed.

NEXT STEPS

A proper assessment of the issues is needed and the ESCC is willing to do an assessment, this would cost the Parish Council £500 and **Keith was asked to ask the WPC to do this.**

Following up from the assessment, there is the possibility that a scheme of improvements that could be included in a Community Match scheme between the WPC & ESCC.

Georgia will obtain more information about the School Streets trial.

The Ashdown Forest Conservators are deciding what concessions can be given to parents and teachers in their car park.

It was suggested that someone approach the Church to explore possibility of greater use of their car park, **and the possibility of the Parish Council helping to fund that.**

It was suggested that instead of a single Lollipop person it could be undertaken by a team of volunteers between them.

Appendix 4 - email from IJ to the resident and County Cllr Taylor with further information on options

If I may, I would like to clarify some of the points being made and to add some observations:

Parking

I have been instructed to not undertake any parking consultations in the Wealden District, as it is not a good use of our resources when they receive little, if any, enforcement. As we discussed, the Parish Council could consider a Feasibility Study and Community Match application for parking restrictions but I felt it was important that those present were aware of the likely levels of enforcement.

Request for controlled crossing

Since the meeting, I have checked our records and we previously assessed for a formal crossing in 2019. It scored 36 in the initial assessment and with the benchmark score for further detailed appraisal being 70, we were unable to take it forward at the time. With the crash record currently being very good, with no recorded personal injury crashes in the latest available three year period, the score would not change.

Again, the Parish Council could consider a Feasibility Study and Community Match application.

Traffic calming – St Johns Road

During the discussions, I did mention that certain types of traffic calming must be illuminated in accordance with the regulations and other types must be visible, either by illumination or very clear road signing. We previously assessed for traffic calming in 2014 and it scored 42 – with the crash record being as it is, this score would not change.

Again, the Parish Council could consider a Feasibility Study and Community Match application.

Speed Limit – School Lane

I am sorry but I do not recall being part of any discussions at the meeting relating to the lack of a speed limit in School Lane. Since receipt of the correspondence, I have asked for this to be assessed against the criteria for some extra funding that we have but I am doubtful if it will meet the requirements. The nature of the road and the presence of the parking would help to restrict vehicle speeds but formal speed data collection would assist in an understanding of the issues.

Again, the Parish Council could consider a Feasibility Study and Community Match application.

School Crossing Patrol

I have since discussed the issue of the vacant School Crossing Patrol with a colleague who supervises them across the county. Arrangements are being made for the supervisor to contact the school and provide new adverts for them to use, providing they are willing to continue sponsoring the post. The supervisor recently carried out a survey here in May and it did not meet the threshold for ESCC funding.