

Councillor Mrs J Gadd
Chairman
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Dear Councillor Mrs Gadd

Aylesford Parking Review

The Steering Group set up to guide the work on the parking review for Aylesford village met again last week following the recent public consultation that has taken place. The Parish Council representatives on the group will no doubt be providing your Members with detailed feedback on what was agreed at the meeting. Suffice it to say for the moment that it was a very constructive meeting on what is usually a fairly difficult topic and I am grateful for the contribution made by the Parish Council representatives.

The on-street proposals circulated as part of the public consultation exercise were endorsed, with the exception of an area in the vicinity of Bush Row, subject to an additional detail to facilitate more convenient access to the allotments on Forstal Road. We hope that when these have advanced through the formal stages and can be implemented they will bring some better and safer organisation of parking in various locations in accordance with the majority of local views that were expressed.

The off-street proposals gave rise to a lot more discussion which was not surprising given the interest generated by the public meeting arranged by the Parish Council during the course of the consultation exercise. The difficult issue is, as would be expected, the proposal to introduce charging in the car parks to bring about some management controls and the Steering Group considered this at some length.

The group was confronted by a number of mutually unobtainable aims and desires. The Parish Council representatives wish for a degree of resident preference in the car parks (as a whole and specifically the one nearest to the village centre) but have no appetite for charging as the management tool that would enable this to take place. There is also an acknowledgement that the Borough Council faces difficult financial challenges across all of its budgets and needs to identify efficiencies where it is logical to do so. This would be consistent with a modest charge to introduce management control in the car parks and would help abate running costs. However, as I have said this approach was not supported by the Parish Council representatives. Equally, however, the

Steering Group has no desire to see a diminution of the level of maintenance in the car parks. For example, one of the more expensive items is CCTV but this is considered to be vital as security in the car parks is a high priority for most local residents.

This might suggest that the meeting ended in impasse and that there was no clear way forward. I am pleased to say that this was not the case. We focused on a particular part of the response to the public consultation, the need for more parking and how this could be addressed by extending the eastern car park onto what has become effectively an over-flow area. I understand that there have been some informal conversations about this area with the Parish Council so it seems right that we should address it in more detail as part of this current review of parking.

There is no doubt that the 'overflow' area provides valuable additional general capacity for residents and businesses and particularly when local events at the Church or the sports ground create a further significant demand. As things stand the area is not made up in any way for parking and there are safety issues arising from the unbarriered proximity to the river. For these reasons, we cannot as landlord condone even informal use of the area and I am sure you and your Members will appreciate the difficult position this creates.

The Steering Group is agreed that additional parking would be helpful for the village and it would like to see the car park extended onto this area. Your representatives on the group are also very keen to preserve the current free status of the car parks. With this in mind, the Group has asked me to write to you to share their thoughts on a partnership approach that might help achieve this as follows:-

- The car park extension (Bailey Bridge East) should be built – the capital cost to be met from partnership contributions from the Parish and Borough Council. A working assumption based on a preliminary assessment is that the budget for the car park extension is likely to be in the order of £55k to create approximately an additional 40 spaces.
- A contribution towards the revenue costs of the car parks to be sought from APC, in the context of the current running costs of approximately £22,000 per annum.
- The Steering Group considered that the revenue costs and contribution should be based on current service levels in the car parks. The security provided by the CCTV system and the standards of maintenance are important to the local community.
- Any parking management measures in the car parks should be held in abeyance while the parking patterns resulting from the increased number of spaces settled down and subsequently reviewed.

I have no doubt that the Parish Council considers these car parks to be really important assets for the future vitality of the village. I hope therefore that you will be keen to work in partnership with the Borough Council to overcome the current difficulties and challenges in a way that is mutually beneficial. My aim is to report back on the results of the Aylesford Parking Review to the next meeting of the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board in mid-May. The reporting deadline is at the start of May so it would be

very helpful if you were able to share the Steering Groups thoughts with your Council in time for me to be able to incorporate its view in my report.

Yours sincerely

Steve Humphrey
Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure

cc: Cllr Nicolas Heslop
Cllr Mark Worrall
Cllr David Smith
Cllr John Balcombe
Cty Cllr Peter Homewood

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