

Wiltshire Council has issued a Traffic Regulation Order implementing parking charges in the Dunns Lane Car Park at Castle Combe. The Council did not have the courtesy to discuss this in advance with the Parish Council and was clearly unaware that when such charges were implemented in the past, they were speedily withdrawn due to the havoc caused on surrounding roads and the resultant danger to visitors and villagers, in the latter case due to the inability of emergency vehicles to access the village centre.

Castle Combe Parish Council has objected in the strongest terms to the CEO and Council Leader but has been stonewalled with a refusal to disclose internal correspondence regarding the matter.

The projected income from this proposal makes no allowance for setting up or running costs, yet is only 0.00007% of the Council's budget. It is clearly a matter of political expediency designed to ensure uniformity across the County despite the potential impact on our residents and villagers.

The last time an identical TRO was proposed in 2017, the then Council Leader intervened to ensure that it was not implemented. Sadly the current leadership is unwilling to do so despite being made fully aware of the potential safety risks.

At its inception the Unitary Council proudly introduced its logo "Where Everybody Matters". In recent years this was quietly dropped when it became evident that it was unsustainable.

Our correspondence with the CEO and Council Leader highlighted the following:

1. The financial projections are incomplete and inaccurate, despite the assurance that this would not be the case.
2. There is no evidence that a risk analysis has ever been undertaken despite the numerous occasions on which the risks have been summarised in detail by us. Neither is there any documented evidence that the risks have been discussed at senior level internally despite our concerns.
3. The Unitary Council is unable to identify any other community with a risk profile commensurate with that of Castle Combe.
4. The TRO does not meet the requirements of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1994.
5. There is no acknowledgment that when charges were previously introduced, they had to be speedily withdrawn due to the havoc on the public highway.
6. Gridlock on the hill can last 30 minutes or more, with a consequent inability of emergency vehicles to access the village centre. The last time this occurred, the ambulance had to take a six mile (17 minute) diversion along narrow country lanes to enter the village from the other end. The danger to life is self evident.
7. The public consultation exercise was yet again of no consequence.
8. The media release claiming that the decision is "evidence based" is meaningless and untenable.
9. The refusal to disclose internal correspondence, on the basis that this would inhibit future debate, is highly questionable. We consider that public authority discussions should be open to scrutiny and have referred this to the Information commissioner's Office.

The Council's Highways department has been very helpful in liaising with us to implement improvements to road markings and signage. However neither these nor increased warden visits will have material effect on the busiest days when we experience total gridlock, which past experience has shown can only become more frequent with a consequent increased risk to the public.

We therefore wish our concerns to be placed on record for referral in the event of a serious incident occurring.

