

We reported at the September Area Board that Wiltshire Council had issued a Traffic Regulation Order implementing parking charges in the Dunns Lane Car Park at Castle Combe.

Councillor Henning subsequently wrote (in his capacity as Chair of the Local Highway and Footway Improvement Group) to the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Mark McClelland, expressing extreme disquiet at the safety implications for both vehicles and pedestrians due to the dangerous nature of the only viable route from the car park to the village.

The response was dismissive and critical of past decision makers, despite their much greater and long standing knowledge of the issues.

The last time an identical TRO was proposed in 2017, the then Council Leader intervened to ensure that it was not implemented in order to prevent a repetition of the dangerous situations which led NWDC to abandon rapidly their own earlier attempt to implement charges.

We have continually stressed that the safety of the public is at risk at present because of the decision to charge despite past such adverse experience.

The effects of car park charging are exactly as we had forecast, with gridlocks on the hill even during the normally quiet month of October. In that month 53 cars were booked, compared with just 2 in the same period last year.

This is just the tip of the iceberg as the number of illegally parked vehicles is far higher, due to the rapid rate of turnover compared with the number of warden visits.

Although these visits have increased, they are not the solution. They are a manifestation of the problems caused unnecessarily by the decision to charge before putting in adequate precautions to ensure the safety of the public.

The Unitary Council's statutory press announcement claimed that the purpose for charging was to encourage the use of public transport and to improve the parking situation in the local area. Both claims are nonsense as there is no bus service on Sundays and Bank Holidays, the busiest days, and the small number of services on the other days could never cope with the thousands of visitors to our tiny village. The parking situation is now far, far worse than it has ever been!

The response to our second Freedom of Information request was woefully inadequate and we have requested a review. In particular we wish to know how many Wiltshire Council public consultations in the last three years have actually led to a proposal being withdrawn.

The Dunns Lane proposal for example was universally opposed, but still went ahead.

The Unitary Council publicity stressed that a consultation exercise was undertaken, but neglected to mention that the outcome was widespread opposition, not support.

We have constantly asked the CEO, Council Leader and Portfolio Holder to suspend parking charges until proposed signage and road marking improvements have been fully implemented and proven to work. They still refuse to do so, despite the evident dangers to the public.

We have therefore requested an urgent formal risk assessment, as the main route into the village is shared by pedestrians (many of them unfamiliar with English traffic) and numerous vehicles, which are impeded by the illegally parked cars. The Unitary Council continues to play Russian Roulette with the safety of the public. This is a recipe for disaster.

