

Castle Combe Parish Council: addendum report to deferred Area Board meeting

Since our report to the last (subsequently deferred) meeting, the risks to the public have continued despite the Unitary Council have been made aware at the very highest levels.

Despite all the evidence, the Council is refusing point-blank to commission an independent risk assessment.

It is our firm belief that such an assessment would undoubtedly confirm that the Council's actions have vastly exacerbated the number of potentially dangerous incidents.

We also believe that the refusal to undertake such a survey is due to the knowledge that it would produce an adverse conclusion.

Despite all the evidence we have provided to them, the Council has **never** mentioned **Safety** in any media briefing.

It would appear that cash generation far outweighs than the known risks to public safety.

Our Freedom of Information request elicited the response that the Council has absolutely no idea of how many consultations in the last two years (on any subject) produced a majority of responses opposing the relevant proposals. Neither does it have any idea how many of those proposals were subsequently withdrawn (if any) due to such opposition. This is a quite remarkable admission and illustrates all too clearly the lack of importance attributed to the consultation process.

Some suggested questions for the Council:

1. Why have they ignored the lessons of the past?
2. Why have no media briefings ever mentioned the proven and serious risks to the public, of which they have been consistently warned?
3. Why have they refused to commission an independent risk analysis?
4. Why do they say the decision was "evidence based" when they have been unable to provide any such evidence?
5. How can they say charging has had no impact when the facts say exactly the opposite?
6. Why do they consistently parrot that a consultation exercise was undertaken, when the universal opposition it disclosed was ignored?
7. Why do they not maintain centralised records of consultation results? Is it because they are not thought important?
8. Why was a Freedom of Information request rejected because it would disclose details of their internal deliberations to the public? This is the purpose of such requests!
9. **Why can they not suspend charging until the risks to the public have been eliminated and been proved to be so by an independent risk assessment?**

We were interviewed by ITV News this week and are in contact with several other media sources. We can only trust that subsequent discussions with them do not relate to the injury or death of a member of the public.

With his agreement, a copy of a villager's recent email to Councillor McClelland is attached and concisely sums up the frustration of villagers. Although a councillor, he wrote in a personal capacity.

We would mention that of the warden visits mentioned by Councillor McClelland, the first eight totalled precisely eleven seconds!

“Dear Dr Mark McClelland,

I was interested in your statement in yesterday's news report on ITV West, specifically "The concerns raised by Castle Combe Parish Council were considered as part of this consultation, but as people already park on the roadside on the hill it was felt that the introduction of charges would not increase the danger to pedestrians. Civil Enforcement Officers are regularly patrolling the village, including throughout the Christmas and New Year period, and are issuing Penalty Charge Notices where there are contraventions."

I'd like to note the following, as I feel the above is disingenuous and misleading, and the record should be corrected:

- It was not just the Parish Council who raised objections to the introduction of charges based on safety concerns; it was also the MP, ex-leader of Wilts Council, the area board, the district councillor and, presumably, the vast majority of people who responded to your consultation, the results of which you have kept very close to your chest.
- The phrase 'it was felt that the introduction of charges would not increase the danger to pedestrians' implies that this is your opinion **prior** to the introduction of charges (presumably dismissing the fact that charges have been removed before due to the impact on safety and that Baroness Jane Scott stepped in on another occasion for the same reason). You've had 3 months, what is your opinion of the impact of the introduction of charges now?
- 'it was felt' - perhaps use the data of what has gone before, rather than your feelings.
- 'including throughout the Christmas and New Year period' - this may be an untruth. No officers were seen on the hill, or tickets, during the Christmas and New Year period by villagers - something the Parish Council received many complaints about.

I guess ultimately, in the modern world, you can say what you like in the media; your statement is misleading at best. It does not alter the fact that there has been a dramatic change in behaviour at the point of introduction of charges with a massive increase in illegal parking. This cannot be disputed, nor the fact that it puts residents and visitor's lives at risk. You are an educated man and, whilst your PhD was in American Literature or something similar, surely it gave you some data analysis skills.

So, once again, what is the Council's conclusion on the impact of safety on the reintroduction of charges?

You've had 3 months. As a reminder:

- Bookings in October increased from 3 to 53 year on year despite only a doubling of patrols.
- Illegal parking on 90% of days in the month following introduction when there is usually none at this time of year.
- Gridlock occurred on multiple occasions in October and over Xmas - in one instance taking 45 mins to get up the hill when, again, this never normally happens at this time of year.
- I personally have now witnessed two car accidents on the hill (one car on car, one a car into a wall), two near misses (one car on car and one where pedestrians had to leap to safety) and there have been many car horns and raised voices. This simply did not happen in previous years.

Mark, you have either wilfully and knowingly put lives at risk, or you and the decision makers are incompetent and unable to understand the implications of your decisions.

I assume it is the former, in which case when there is the inevitable accident, their blood will be on your hands.

A reminder; we don't oppose the introduction of charges. You need to fix the safety issues first. That is your job and your responsibility.

John.”