

AREA BOARD PROJECTS AND COUNCILLOR LED INITIATIVES APPLICATION FORM 2016/2017

Area Board Project

1. What is the Initiative?

Funding is to be withdrawn by Wiltshire Council for Avoncliff Car Park within the next few weeks. Those that use the car park regularly include tourists, visitors, local business employees, commuters, walkers, diners, service vehicles (e.g. for boats), clubs and groups using vehicles to transport disabled persons, party groups, runners and equipment such as cycles, canoes, fishing gear.

Consultation with stakeholders - including the Canal and River Trust, Great Western Railway and Westwood Parish Council and the Cross Guns pub - has failed to identify funds to lease the land from the private landowner.

2. Where is the initiative taking place?

Former Avoncliff Public Car Park (in Westwood Parish)

3. When will the initiative take place?

Following Wiltshire Council's ending of the lease agreement on 23 March 2016

4. What is the Community benefit/evidence of need/links to Community Plan/Community Issue?

It supports the objectives of the emerging Westwood Neighbourhood Plan by:

- retaining offstreet parking, thereby avoiding chaos
- protecting emergency access
- securing access for disabled children and adults
- supporting local tourism and business
- supporting the operation of Avoncliff Station
- securing positive environmental benefits

5. What is the desired outcome of this initiative?

To protect the economic viability and social fabric of the hamlet

A community-based solution seems the only way forward and the Area Board can play a role to pump-prime the establishment of a private car park in the hamlet.

6. Who will Project Manage this initiative?

Avoncliff Community Group

7. Costs/quotes/ match funding? (total cost £5k require 1 quote, total cost £5k-25k require 3 quotes)

The landlord is willing to consider a joint-funded solution to establish a privately owned and run car park.

Options for capital investment are being discussed with the Avoncliff Community Group. Investment is required to construct a wall on the western boundary of the car park and protective barriers on the northern and western boundaries of the car park. The wall is required because the prevailing wind sometimes blows down the existing fence on the western boundary. The barriers are required because the current fencing (on the northern and western boundaries) is frequently hit by cars and damaged to an extent that it is susceptible to blowing over in moderate/high winds. This has happened on three occasions in the past 18 months resulting in a danger to the public and a risk of damage to vehicles.

A full proposal with costings will be presented to the area board meeting.

8. Additional information

The closure of Avoncliff car park, would have the effect of disenfranchising the people of West Wiltshire regarding access to one of the most unusual and beautiful parts of the County, and have a major impact on the residents and businesses within Avoncliff. The community has outlined the resulting effects of the closure below:

1. No car park will cause chaos

There is not a single legitimate parking space for visitors on the south side of Avoncliff. This means visitors will be tempted to use residents' private driveways, park in passing places on the road (where ease of passage is already badly compromised by erosion of the verges), or park beyond the 'Residents Only' and 'Safety' signs.

Before the car park was instituted the hill was regularly blocked as cars parked in resident areas, on bends causing blockages and huge issues on sunny days and all school and summer holidays. Even with the car park on pleasant weekend, school holidays and bank holidays illegal and inconsiderate parking is common. Removal of the car park would increase this kind of inconsiderate parking and parking that will block the route into Avoncliff on a regular basis.

2. Blocking emergency assistance

This is a huge concern for the community. People, homes and businesses in Avoncliff will be at risk if emergency vehicles cannot gain access when routes are blocked by parked vehicles. This has happened on occasions before the car park was available, when access to the hamlet was completely blocked. On 8th February 2016, three Fire & Rescue vehicles were parked in Avoncliff car park attending an emergency. What will they do when the car park is closed? How does the Council plan to ensure the safety of residents?

http://m.wiltshiretimes.co.uk/news/14261384.Huge_tree_falls_onto_Avoncliff_barge_blocking_boats_in_both_directions/

3. No access for disabled children and adults

Currently the south side of Avoncliff is accessible to all. The car park allows a disabled person on their own or with their carer to park and get out of the car on the level and then easily get up onto the canal path to enjoy the countryside and fresh air. In the summer months it is not unusual to see mini-busses transporting groups of disabled children and adults.

Mini-buses park in the car park so that their passengers can enjoy the environment of Avoncliff. Does the Council wish to deny access to these groups? This does not seem to be in line with 'Disability Friendly Bradford-on-Avon' for which the Council has received considerable funding. There are very few places which are accessible to wheelchair users for them to enjoy the countryside and the fresh air.

4. Hitting tourism and businesses

Wiltshire Council's website states: '**Boosting Wiltshire's economy is one of the Council's key priorities**'. In Avoncliff there are three tourism-related businesses which contribute towards the local economy: the exceptionally busy Cross Guns pub, Rebel Angel and No 10 Tea Gardens.

Closure of the car park will restrict tourists visiting Avoncliff. Taking a conservative estimate of ten cars a day not visiting the area, this would mean over 3,500 cars a year unable to enjoy Avoncliff. This will have a major knock-on effect on those businesses in the hamlet. 3,500 less cars is a lot of lost trade.

Also, these businesses will still remain an attraction to visitors, but without a public car park some Avoncliff residents could lose their normal parking spaces if they leave them unoccupied (despite the 'Residents Only' signage).

Avoncliff and the Aquaduct, canal barges and local walks are also a tourist destination in their own right, even if there were no other businesses here. Tourists come here from far and wide as we are also within the Cotswolds and they come via car, train and on foot.

Summer months see hundreds of visitors on weekend days and school holidays. The car park is even advertised in Wiltshire Councils and Bradford on Avon's own tourist pamphlets and web sites. Visiting Avoncliff will become an unbearable pain for visitors arriving by car and for residents.

5. Effect on Avoncliff Station

As noted above there are many commuters that park in Avoncliff to catch the train to work in Bath, Bristol, Trowbridge, and further afield. Since the car park was created in the early 1990s passengers at Avoncliff Station, have risen from less than 8,000 a year to over 19,000 with many now using the car park and coming from Westwood in particular.

It has also been suggested that the Westwood bus service is to be reduced then these commuters will have to drive a longer distance – adding to the unsustainability of the car park closure. They will need to find an alternative route to work, and the environmental impact of this is noted in point 6 (below).

However, if just five commuter journeys a day (a very conservative number) cease as a result of the car park closure, this will result in a reduction of around 1300 train journeys a year. If you said that these commuters were all purchasing a return to Bath (the most local commuter trip - £6 return), this is £7800 in lost revenue.

6. Environmental Impact

Finally, Avoncliff car park is used by commuters and other travelers coming from Westwood and the surrounding area who use the railway station to access Bath, Bristol, Salisbury and the Coast. Has the Council considered that if commuters have nowhere to park they will probably drive to their destinations, which is undesirable in terms of adding to city congestion and pollution? This will become more of an issue if the bus service through Westwood is discontinued or reduced.

Due to the impacts (listed 1-6), the Avoncliff community feel that it would be essential to erect signs at the top of the lane advising that there is no public parking in Avoncliff (due to the withdrawal of Council Funds). It is hoped that the Council will reconsider its decision to close Avoncliff car park and look at ways of raising revenue to support this important local amenity as the negatives far outweigh the small cost of keeping this valuable community asset open.

If the Council decision is not reconsidered, the Avoncliff community, which is a very close and active one, will need to take further steps to raise awareness to this issue at a regional and national level.