

Parking in Fittleworth

Introduction

Over the two days 11th and 12th April 2019, the combination of some well-attended events, which attracted people from outside the village, led to a series of problems with parking, and considerable correspondence on the social media website Nextdoor. As a result of this, the parish council has been asked to give its views on the topic, and publicise any initiatives which are planned. We should emphasise that the parish council has no statutory responsibilities in this area, but we can act as a channel for local opinion and seek to influence West Sussex.

West Sussex

West Sussex Highways Department is responsible for roads and footpaths. They are currently engaged in one initiative which may have a significant effect on parking in our village. The scheme 'Schools Keep Clears' traffic order, which has just been through a period of consultation, is intended to improve the safety of roads around schools. Different detailed proposals are made for each school; the planned changes to parking in the vicinity of Fittleworth School are shown on a plan displayed on the parish council noticeboard since the beginning of March. There are two components:

- 1) No waiting at any time in a T-shaped area which includes a short length of Greatpin Croft before it meets School Lane, and similar lengths of School Lane each side of the junction
- 2) No waiting between 8 am and 5 pm on weekdays on both sides of School Lane near the entrance to the Village Hall car park

Although these changes will slightly reduce the number of parking spaces available, the parish council took the view that the changes would lead to improved safety for children being brought to school, and for drivers negotiating the Greatpin Croft / School Lane junction. We made no objection to them.

Parking in Church Lane

Because on the Friday in question, a very well attended funeral was taking place in St Mary's Church, parking in Church Lane was mentioned in the Nextdoor correspondence. From time to time weddings and funerals take place which fill up all the parking available in Church Lane. Perhaps the Church could strengthen their advice to attendees to park considerately, although we recognise that the level of attendance at events like this can be hard to predict.

Parking in School Lane

The stretch of School Lane which includes the entrance to the Village Hall car park and the new community shop is at the heart of the issue.

In comparison with many other villages, Fittleworth has a reasonable level of parking availability. The Village Hall has been very tolerant of the use of its car park by drivers other than those attending events in the Hall, which has served the village well. Even the increased traffic generated by the new shop and playground does not generally cause problems. There is congestion at the start and end of the school day, but mostly people cope with this.

There are regular occasions when the Hall is used by large groups, which even with the encouragement of car sharing does bring increased traffic. This is the case with the two Arts Society groups, which meet near the beginning of each month (one on the first Tuesday, the other on the first Wednesday). On 10th / 11th April, the Hall was hired in the evening by Petworth Festival for launch events. This resulted in many vehicles arriving from outside the village, which combined with the large number of people attending the gathering in the Sports Club led to an unprecedented number of vehicles trying to park in the village.

What can be done to improve the situation? It would be unreasonable to suggest that the Hall should not take bookings involving large numbers of visitors – it is the revenue from such events which enables the village to enjoy the excellent facilities of the Hall for local purposes.

Better coordination may help - there is already a system in place between the shop and the Hall. A meeting took place between the Hall and the Sports Club on 7th May (with parish council presence); this agreed that the Sports Club would alert the Hall in advance of any event which might lead to congestion. It was pointed out that the Club could check the Hall website for bookings if they were planning an event which might attract large numbers of visitors. The Hall is also considering the feasibility of an extension to its car park at the rear.

Constructive ideas from residents for solving issues like this would be well received; the Annual Village Meeting on 21st May, and the Village Hall AGM planned for 11th July, would be appropriate occasions.

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