



Report 2020/05-02

Agenda Item No: 11

Committee: Full Council

Date: 14 May 2020

Title: Wood Street Village Green 'Triangle'

By: Victoria Fear, Assistant Clerk

Purpose of Report: To present feedback (from May 2020) received from the flyers delivered to properties located around the village green with respect to the offer of free temporary concrete blocks to be provided by Surrey County Council.

Recommendations

You are recommended:

1. To note the information within this report.
2. To politely decline the County Council's offer to provide concrete blocks and that any decisions about potential long-term defences be deferred until after the Covid-19 restrictions are lifted to enable the Parish Council to hold a public meeting with the residents around the Green before any decisions are taken.

1. Information

- 1.1 The Parish Council leases the land on which the unauthorised encampment recently occurred. It is leased from Surrey County Council.
- 1.2 The residents of the property most affected by the incursion (Nightingale Old Farm) requested that efforts be refocused on preventing the vehicles accessing the triangle and depositing debris into and over the boundary into their garden.
- 1.3 As a result of this request, the Assistant Clerk met Ian Horgan from Surrey County Council and Jim Treacy from Maltaward (providers of large concrete blocks as used in the past by Worplesdon Parish Council, Surrey Wildlife Trust and Surrey County Council) to assess the site.
- 1.4 Logs are in place along a proportion of this land (to the right of the picture below) and recycled plastic posts, installed recently by Worplesdon Parish Council, are in place along Pound Lane.



The vehicles in the most recent incident gained access on this occasion by driving between the large tree (towards the right of the picture below) and the bouncy seat (on the left of the picture below).



- 1.5 Whilst the logs are a low visual impact, and deemed 'in keeping' and 'appropriate' by local residents, they can be moved relatively easily either by forklift, rolling or dragging, as they have been in the past.
- 1.6 To encourage feedback from local residents on the matter listed on the agenda for 14 May 2020, the Assistant Clerk delivered (whilst wearing PPE mask and gloves) flyers to every house around the village green.
- 1.7 The feedback has been assimilated below:

Alex Waugh (Chair of the Wood Street Village Association)

There is a reluctant acceptance by a large majority of respondents that some sort of barrier to encampment on the Triangle should be installed, although some express the view that this will most likely mean that visiting travellers simply relocate to another spot in the village, including the Village Green itself. A few respondents think that it would be better to live with the current situation.

There is very little support for the idea of concrete blocks, whether painted green or left *au naturel*, with some very vehement objections. The greatest number of respondents favour the construction of a bank and ditch to make vehicular access difficult, as has been used near Rokers and the village cricket pitch. This could presumably be constructed reasonably easily with a mechanical digger, and could be seeded with grass and/or wildflowers and bulbs. Posts, as already installed alongside Pound Lane, were a second option. In either case, a number of people remarked that a means of maintaining access (eg by making one or two of the posts along Pound Lane removable) would be sensible in order to allow access for maintenance.

Resident A

As a local resident who lives on the Green I am as concerned as everyone else around here, about which is the best way to prevent future unauthorised encampments on this part of the green.

Out of the options that you have given **I would like to see a BUND installed**. The temporary blocks will stop the travellers straight away but they will be very unsightly. Once installed I wonder how long 'Temporary' would be. It could be years. The posts already installed would also be very unsightly. A pity simple natural wood was not used. The intrusion on Nightingale Farm house residents needs to BE STOPPED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE so I hope that a bund could be installed without further delay.

Thank to those concerned who provided toilets for the Last visitors and for the quick and thorough clean up. Much appreciated as a dog owner.

Resident B

Sadly there is no ideal solution to this problem & one that will keep everyone happy, but obviously something has to be done for the sake of [the residents of Nightingale Old Farm] for whom it is an unpleasant experience & also the cost of providing loos/ clearing up the mess by GBC.

Having given it a great deal of thought....this is how we feel about the problemwe are very wary about the 'temporary' concrete blocks, they will look very unsightly (even in green) & will certainly be quickly covered in graffiti: it would be more economical to put the money straight into something permanent ie. the bund or posts.

In the end we think the best bet will be posts to match those already present along Pound Lane, but would the red reflectors in the posts be necessary?! (they look so out of keeping)!? The idea of a bund (all be it covered in wild flowers etc) would look a bit like the trenches in WW1 & would impede the visual through vista! We wonder what the difference in cost would be between posts versus bund, & also the costs of ongoing maintenance etc?

Resident C

I recognise the need to adopt measures but these must be consistent with the ambience of the area and be aesthetically acceptable.

The installation of green concrete blocks, even on a temporary basis, is entirely unacceptable and is not consistent with the maintenance of an area of grass which is within the Wood Street Village Conservation Area.

An alternative to the concrete blocks would be large natural rocks, of similar weight to the blocks, placed in hollows in the ground to prevent their being rolled away.

The option of a bund, by which I understand a bank with a ditch beside it, would be acceptable, as would additional posts and a gate, so long as they were sufficiently robust and secure. Another acceptable approach would be to stop mowing the area, apart from around the children's play equipment, and allow it to develop into a mini conservation area to encourage natural flora and fauna.

Resident D

With regards as to how to deter them from returning to the green I strongly disagree with the use of concrete blocks painted green as they are an eyesore which I will have to look at for the entire year when the traveller issue is for only for a few weeks of the year.

I would be happy with a bund and additional posts and gates in keeping with the area.

Resident E

I have been copied in on [Resident J's] e-mail - (I too have lived in WSV since 1986) and am fully familiar with the problem. I agree with his main points but I honestly feel I may feel a bit more dissatisfied if there was an encampment on the common land outside my home - (we live in White Hart Lane but have lived previously in Frog Grove Lane and Oak Hill prior to that).

In concluding, the "traveller" problem is unlikely to go away and if it does move from the "triangle" it is probable it will re-appear somewhere else nearby. Nevertheless, a policy of appeasement is not effective either. In terms of preference to the options - a bund and then posts would be my choice.

Resident F

[We] both feel that the best solution is for a 'bund' to the 'triangle'.

We feel that concrete won't look very good and will be covered with graffiti in a short time.

Resident G [from Nightingale Old Farm]

Just to reiterate that our preference between the options is for a bund. We feel that this would be least intrusive along the front of the triangle. More posts along the front edge would be very unsightly.

Should there need to be a gate, maybe this could be accommodated along the Pound Lane edge where it could replace some of the posts that have been put in.

Resident H

I realise that you must be getting many strong feelings about this. We all need to be constructive, proportional and think carefully in voicing our views.

As a walker who has lived here for 45 years ... I spend many happy hours (especially at the moment) wandering around this beautiful area. The majority of the year, the area in question remains free of any use other than by walkers, their dogs and families happily playing. I understand that the village is very frightened of the potential for the travellers to disrupt our lives - and they are doing just that by their behaviour recently and in other times. I also know the police will say that they can only move them on and take further action if there is evidence of some criminal damage, thereby giving them a basis on which to do so.

Bluntly, I am horrified by the idea of hired temporary green painted concrete blocks, for which SCC say they will pay. Surely, if the blocks are temporary and therefore to be removed at some future date, the whole problem will then start again and we will be back to considering the other options under scrutiny ... then may be the blocks might just become permanent anyway? I remain wary of the work 'temporary' ... I doubt in reality if they will ever be removed and they will undoubtedly be a dreadful visual scar on the Green.

Please can we have more of the posts (and a gate for access on Village Show day) on Pound Lane. I never understood why they were only put down the Lane only in the first place - seemed very odd to me.. to finish the job satisfactorily, they should have been put around the whole triangle then too. What would be the cost of that, please?

I do not favour a bund but would tolerate it over concrete.

Leaving the space as it is, will not satisfy many of the villagers so I think is a non-starter.

Resident I

My own opinion and without dissention, the opinion of every other household around the Green with whom I have been able to make contact within the short time allowed is that concrete blocks are the worst of all suggested options and must be strongly opposed. Unfortunately, many had been inadvertently misled by the inclusion of the word 'temporary' in the description taking it to mean 'short term' rather than simply not secured by a foundation. In the opinion of all, aesthetically, they would be an intrusion, particularly in a conservation area and they are not acceptable as a solution.

In short, Thank You but quite definitely, No Thank You.

Clearly the cost of installing the blocks is itself prohibitive and to comprehend the Council agreeing to make double this cost available even once a year for the blocks' installation and

subsequent removal is at best fanciful. Were such funds to be sanctioned, the cost of storage of the blocks would then need to be considered: SCC have made it clear that they wish to be rid of them and would not want their return and the Council has only one single lock-up garage off Gravetts Lane as storage. Thus, doubtless once installed the blocks would have to remain on the Green until removal and permanent disposal at some considerable cost.

My opinion (but not that of every household canvassed) is that if any barrier is to be approved, it should be a bund: aesthetically acceptable and at small cost. A digging machine and operative for a few days could create this and quite likely the WSG Horticultural Society would be happy to plant bulbs or other flowers and to grass the area, with or without another grant from the SCC. As with blocks or any other form of barrier, a small gap could remain to allow cars to access to the area.

Posts and tree trunks are generally seen as acceptable (as they have been with great success opposite the Memorial Hall) and would not need replacing for many years by which time it is most likely that the law would have been changed to make such trespass a criminal rather than a civil offence. However, it is accepted that posts could be removed unlawfully without any great problem.

Also, a number consider that no solution is required and that to suffer the short annual incursion is preferable to any barrier or worse, encouraging the so-called travelling fraternity to occupy the Green itself.

It is however well understood that the occupants of Nightingale Old Farm are continually aggrieved by the incursions but as no other family is significantly affected, the Parish Council might consider installing a high chain-link fence along their boundary with the Triangle to alleviate the problem and at a materially lower cost the concrete blocks.

There is significant anger around The Green at the apparent indecent haste with which this proposal has been brought before the Council during this lock-down period during which residents' meetings not permitted. Should therefore the concrete block proposal be passed by the Council at Thursday's meeting, it is suggested that a petition in opposition should be raised to request the Council at an early stage to either reverse their previous decision or otherwise to permanently remove the blocks.

Finally, I know a number of residents are looking to attend the meeting in an effort to provide maximum opposition to the blocks plan but the continued Coronavirus disease is, of course, a significant barrier to any physical attendance. This therefore may necessarily have to be postponed until the next meeting when, should it prove necessary, a petition could be placed before the Council.

Resident J

We have had travellers on the triangle on the Green for the 34 years that we have lived here.

They have usually been here the week before the Epsom Derby.

Yes, they have been here for 5 or 6 days and moved on and left rubbish etc.. for the council (we) to pay for but otherwise no problem to the village.

We have had a lady traveller pitching her caravan by the opposite pond – by the bus stop!

We are not going to stop the Travellers if they want to stay.

A bund would be the best (and cheapest) idea as we have done at the Cricket Club, a deep ditch and a mound type bund makes it hard for them to access. It also makes it hard for us to maintain.!

However, if they want to access the area they will. Posts are a waste of time, concrete blocks are an environmental disaster – and they would move them.

My biggest worry is that if we try to cordon off this triangle they will come onto the village green or elsewhere within the village.

As I said, we have had this for 34 years and it is a temporarily hiccup that goes away – no need for dramatic action.

Leave everything as it is – please

We understand that the new owners of the adjacent property are concerned – but they need to be reassured that after 34 years plus it is very short episode in their lives!

Resident K [letter delivered by hand to the Assistant Clerk's Home]

I am very worried that any means to stop the 1 – 5 caravans on the triangle will result in the vans moving to the village green and then more travellers joining them with no official temporary sites in the area we could have a bigger problem on our green.

As for the encampment we had as in the past when asked for my views I have not had any problems. I walk past with my dog every morning between 7 and 7.30 and again later there was 2 occasions the foxes ripped the rubbish bags the 1st time it was cleared very quickly the 2nd time the council man was there between 7 to 7.45 so he did it. When they left I was again there at 7am and the van was there to clear up but there was less to clear up than is regularly left in Pound Lane and around the village they left very quickly. I saw just 3 or 4 things that were left and no small rubbish.

I would not like to see concrete blocks around the triangle painted green at the expense of the parish council, not in keeping with our peaceful village.

A bund I am told would be seven thousand pounds not in the budget in these times of serious pandemic. At the time when the play park was cancelled on this area we were told it couldn't be fenced or gated, what has changed?

As to the fourth suggestion to leave the space as it is, I think with all the other options the only one that maybe would look better than tanks traps in a war situation not in a quiet peaceful village setting would be an extravagant expense at this time.

The families that were there for a short time had young children, kept themselves to themselves as we are having to get used to in these strange worrying times and I saw no problems maybe others did but I did not.

I would say to protect our green, hopefully, to leave the space as it is as all best options are too expensive.

Resident L [verbal comments to the Assistant Clerk in a phone call]

Concrete blocks would end up being permanent and would look awful. I feel it's a foregone conclusion that these awful blocks will be put in place.

Resident M [comments to the Assistant Clerk in a WhatsApp message]

In the short term I'd rather not have blocks and the efforts be used to push the bund plans forward.

2. Financial Appraisal

- 2.1 The cost of installing a 200m long bund (200m measurement is from the corner of the boundary of Nightingale Old Farm, around the edge of the triangle, and along Pound Lane) was quoted as £7,500 (from Maltaward). The bund would be 1.5m wide and 1m high. There would be an additional cost for us to plant it with wildflowers/grasses, and an additional cost for an access gate to facilitate vehicular access for tree surgeons and any other necessary contractors.
- 2.2 The cost to install temporary concrete blocks from Maltaward breaks down as follows:
- Delivery of blocks: £1,500
 - Collection of blocks: £1,500
 - Painting of blocks in mid-green (optional): £1,080
 - Weekly hire of 24no 3 tonne concrete blocks: £180

3. Overall Appraisal

There are very strong opinions from residents who live around The Green and those who live within the village. Only two residences are directly affected by the encampments – one visually and one as a result of debris disposed of over their boundary.

There is no specific provision in the 2020/2021 budget to install a bund, a significant number of additional posts, large stone boulders, together with an access gate.

Aesthetically no one solution appeals to everyone, and similarly there are concerns that by securing the triangle area, this will displace any future unauthorised visits to other locations within the village, thereby creating additional, and potentially more complicated, issues.

It is suggested that a public consultation take place to discuss the matter once Covid-19 restrictions are lifted.

There is universal opposition to the proposal to install temporary concrete blocks.