

Lindfield Parish Council

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18th February 2025

Dear Rob,

Village Parking- Stakeholder Engagement

Thank you for your letter dated 24th January.

It is obviously pleasing to know that MSDC is "*...currently reviewing existing arrangements in the car parks it operates in the villages...To achieve the best possible outcomes from this work...*" however, it is unclear from a Lindfield perspective precisely what issue or range of issues this work is seeking to address, whether the work would in fact address those issues, and how a positive outcome would be defined or measured.

Whilst the statement "*Car parks cost money to maintain and if they are not properly managed, they can result in frustration, with drivers struggling to find a space.*" is undoubtedly accurate, it is more difficult to understand how the range of options proffered would materially improve the parking situation in Lindfield Village. The reality is that there are a finite number of parking spaces within the village and simply introducing charging or further restrictions does not change that position. In Lindfield Parish Council's (LPC) view, the impact of such charging is likely to be detrimental to residents, local businesses and visitors alike. Accordingly, **LPC is strongly against the introduction of a charging scheme and requests that MSDC does not proceed with any such proposals.**

As one of our councillors commented "*...I don't have any issues with parking in the village. On the odd occasion I need to drive to the village then I never have any trouble parking. I think the maximum stay time limits are good enough and it's handy not having to pay if one is just quickly popping to the Post Office or something...*" This view seems to reflect a wider consensus that, yes, parking can be slightly difficult on occasions but generally spaces can be found, even if it might sometimes mean parking slightly further afield, such as in one of the Common Car Parks or at Hickmans Lane Recreation Ground.

In terms of more detailed considerations, LPC requests that MSDC carefully assesses the following issues, before taking any further action in respect of parking arrangements within the village: -

- a) Any proposals to charge for parking are likely to be cost negative for MSDC if not effectively enforced, as there would insufficient income to cover the costs of implementation (e.g. surveillance and ticketing equipment, manpower requirements).
- b) MSDC's Parking Enforcement appears to have had resourcing issues for many years. It is difficult to understand how this will be improved but unless it becomes fully resourced and effective, the cost issues identified under a) above will be amplified.

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- c) Businesses, as well as residents, rely on the current parking arrangements and implementing a charging scheme would be likely to have a negative effect on trading and be counterproductive to countrywide efforts to support High Street businesses. Anecdotal feedback from a local business is that changes to charging arrangements in a local town had a noticeable negative effect on their trading. Lindfield currently has a dynamic and individual High Street, which must be carefully supported into the future.
- d) Parking pressures at school pick up and drop off times are likely to be exacerbated by any scheme which limits access to car parks or street parking, whether through charging or other restrictions.
- e) Residents without off-street parking would be likely to apply for residents parking schemes to be introduced, to reduce the likely knock on impact of displaced vehicles under any charging regime. This could lead to increased conflict as available parking spaces are further reduced.
- f) Charging residents with no access to off street parking seems unfair, recognising the limited alternative options available within the village.
- g) Whilst some may choose to park in the Common or Hickmans Lane car parks if charging is introduced, pressures on surrounding roads is also likely to increase. It was noted that when the 4-hour parking restriction was introduced in the High Street some years ago, it pushed the parking problems into neighbouring roads, with Chaloner Road being significantly affected.
- h) Having first clarified what it is that MSDC are trying to achieve, both for itself and the likely affected villages, a comprehensive assessment should be undertaken by the appropriate consultants for MSDC, to ensure that whatever proposals are taken forward are likely to address *all* relevant issues. Particularly that the any changes will not be detrimental to residents' experiences, local businesses' trading, or MSDC's costs, recognising a) and b) above. It would be unfortunate, to say the least, if the costs incurred by MSDC under its proposals ultimately led to increased Council Tax bills for residents and businesses to cover any deficits created by any new scheme.

If, despite LPC's strong objections and appropriate consideration of all the elements detailed above, MSDC do proceed to implement parking charges, LPC considers that there should be an initial free parking period of at least 30-45 minutes (preferably longer) to provide flexibility for users and, hopefully, at least partially offset some of the likely negative impacts identified. If a web-based parking tool is being considered, great care should be taken to ensure its efficacy recognising the limited mobile signal in several village locations.

Looking to the future, it is likely that more housing developments will put increase pressure on village amenities, including parking. Against that background, it is essential that MSDC, as the Local Planning Authority, ensures that public transport, cycling and pedestrian infrastructure is also improved to encourage more people to utilise sustainable alternatives and not wholly rely on driving.



David Parsons
Deputy Parish Clerk

See pages 3-4 for responses to the five questions included in your letter.

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Answers to Questions posed by MSDC:

1. **Parking Challenges:** What difficulties do you and your residents, service users, staff, and visitors face when trying to park?
 - a. Is it difficult to find a parking space when needed?
 - Whilst, on occasion, it can be difficult to find spaces, it is recognised by all that there is a finite amount of space within the village and users will usually find a solution either by parking slightly further away or through natural turnover of spaces. Adding administration and / or charges would not appear likely to change this situation.
 - b. Are the current restrictions too limiting (e.g., are maximum stay times too short)?
 - They seem about right, although the relative lack of Parking Enforcement can make the limitations somewhat academic.
 - c. Are there specific issues for commuters, shoppers, residents, and local employees?
 - As detailed elsewhere, whilst spaces are limited, the combination of alternative car parks and natural turnover makes the position generally manageable.
2. **Parking Discs:** Parking discs are hard to find, difficult for the District Council to enforce and manage, and costly to produce. This can discourage people from visiting the villages. What are your thoughts on these potential alternative solutions to achieve the same objectives:
 - a. Implementing "online" disc parking using the Council's current pay-by-mobile operator.
 - Lindfield does not currently have a parking disc system and adding this bureaucracy would not appear to be a positive step in improving parking. Further, as advised by Lindfield Medical Centre, the village has a higher than average proportion of older residents, some of whom may be unable to use any online system.
 - b. Installing terminals that issue free tickets stating the time limit.
 - As detailed under a) and b) in the letter above, it does not seem likely that MSDC's costs would be covered or whether effective enforcement could or would take place
 - This is perhaps the least inappropriate of the proposals, if usage remained free, that there were sufficient terminals, and the technology was accessible to all users. However, being located in a Conservation Area, great care would be needed to ensure that any terminals were not intrusive or unsightly.
 - c. Introducing pre-registration online for frequent users and others.
 - Most visitors access the parking spaces as and when they need them – enforcing a pre-booking approach is likely to be detrimental to all concerned, putting off visitors and negatively affecting High Street trading.
3. **Stricter Time Restrictions or Charges:** If stricter time restrictions or charges were introduced, what measures do you think would be needed to lessen the impact:
 - a. On different types of users, such as commuters, your employees, regular visitors, residents who use the car parks, shoppers, service users, and specific staff (e.g., teachers, doctors, administrators).

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- b. By offering specific products, such as free or discounted permits or overnight permits which allow a few hours either side for residents.
 - It seems counterproductive to propose to introduce a stricter regime and then consider ways to lessen its impact. It is important to clarify what problem is it that MSDC are trying to solve and how any increased restrictions or charges might achieve that aim. Perhaps more important, is to look to make active travel a realistic option through investing in better walking and cycling access. MSDC, as the Local Planning Authority, is well positioned to address this bigger picture and not simply focus on parking charges as 'low hanging fruit.'

4. **Residents' Use of Car Parks:** Do you have any information or opinions on residents and their use of village or local car parks? For example:
 - a. Do many houses lack off-street parking?
 - Yes, a significant number, especially in the High Street and in some nearby roads.
 - b. Is there a concern that residents' use of car parks limits availability for other users during the day?
 - In the absence of regular, effective parking enforcement, it is quite difficult to tell whether this is the case. Anecdotally, many overnight parked cars are removed from the car parks and High Street during the day, suggesting that this is not a material issue.
 - Effectively blocking access to car parks and the High Street through charging or other restrictions is likely to make the little on-street parking available even more pressured and potentially lead to parking disputes. Where would affected residents be expected to park?

5. **Improving Car Park Efficiency:** Do you have any ideas on how to make the car parks more efficient and help more people find parking when they need it? For example:
 - a. Removing special permit-only spaces.
 - The Tollgate Car Park special permit spaces are mainly for Medical Centre Staff – no-one would benefit from reducing their access or ability to park.
 - There are a few residents parking spaces for the adjoining flats / sheltered accommodation, where contractual agreements may be in place and some residents may be unable to walk further if those spaces were taken away. It is also important to note that Compton Road, where the Car Park is situated, is also an area where there is already severe pressure on street parking.
 - b. Adjusting the balance between long-stay and short-stay parking bays.
 - All of Lindfield's MSDC operated car parks are short stay. It would not seem appropriate to change any of these to longer stay, as it would be likely to exacerbate parking issues in and around the High Street.
 - c. Introducing reasonable charges to manage demand and encourage turnover.
 - As detailed above, this would appear to be counter productive for residents, businesses and visitors. Indeed, for some users, having paid for parking may encourage them to stay longer than they do under the present regime, rather than encouraging turnover.