

PARKS CAR PARK CONSULTATION

I am writing to comment on the parking restrictions proposed for Sutherland Memorial Park.

I am the chair of the Sutherland Memorial Park Amenities Club (SMPAC) ¹ committee. – a voluntary body – and my interest is in the effect of the proposals for the legitimate users of the park. These include the constituent clubs of the Amenities Club (the bowling, football and tennis clubs) and the hirers of the Memorial Hall, both casual and long-term which includes the Peter Rabbit nursery. Council officials have advised that these legitimate park users will not be exempted from the parking restrictions and charges as proposed.

The SMPAC opposes the application of the proposed restrictions on these park users for the following reasons:

The reasons published by the Council state that the restrictions are intended to limit *non-users* of the park from parking all day. I understand these include commuters who leave their cars and travel onto their places of work by other means and coach trippers leaving their cars all day. Our experience is that these are **not** major problems in Sutherland Memorial Park car park as they may be in parks closer to town, and so the Council's Statement of Reasons are nether relevant nor valid for Sutherland Park.

The pictures below were taken mid-morning during a typical weekday (Thursday 14 June 10:30am) and illustrate the typical state of the car park on a mid-week day.



Bowling club

Home matches invariably take more than 4 hours from arrival for setting up until the visiting team has left following the end of the match and the subsequent hospitalities. For away matches members generally call at the club to collect their bowls etc. before travelling to the away match venue. Their cars are often left at the club for the duration so that players can travel together to the match venue in as few cars as possible. Matches are played at both weekends and weekdays. Club events, such as finals days, are all day events typically running from 10am until 6pm. The proposed parking restrictions and charges which we understand are to apply 7 days a week until 8pm will add significantly to the costs of bowling at the club and will have major implications for the affordability of membership for many of the club's members, especially those who are pensioners on fixed incomes. This will discourage their continued membership which would seem directly contrary to the Council's Get Active 50+ policy.

Parking restrictions and charges would also discourage visiting clubs from fulfilling fixtures, and they would be a set-back to the club's ambitions to host prestigious county level bowling tournaments. The bowling club members are aware of parking concessions enjoyed by other clubs they play on a regular basis.

The bowling club is currently in negotiation with the Council to renew its lease. These charges will have a negative effect on the viability of the club and therefore there will be an impact on those negotiations. Should the bowling club decide against renewing its lease it's members could quite easily disperse to other clubs. In that case the council will lose rent and green maintenance from the bowling club of over £6,500. The green would fall into disuse and that would presumably put the Green Flag status of the park in doubt.

Football club

The parking restrictions will cause significant issues as players generally need to park for longer than 4 hours. The club has players coming from far and wide who need to be able to use the car park from 12.30 until 6pm. Asking players to pay to park will limit the numbers who are willing to play for the club. Should the football club decide to move to alternative facilities as a consequence the council will lose the pitch hire fees the club pays which currently amount to around £2,000 p.a.

Peter Rabbit Nursery

It is reassuring to note that the Council has recently advised the nursery that exemptions for staff will be granted.

The SMPAC

Under it's previous leases the SMPAC was given priority access to 50 parking spaces for its constituent clubs. At SMPAC committee meetings in 2016 and 2017 the Council representative member, Paul Stacey, advised of the likelihood of parking restrictions but assured the committee that the intention was "...to stop the abuse of the car parks *not to penalise genuine users*", and that a voucher system would be introduced to exempt club members and visiting players. The insistence now of council officials that there will be no exemptions is therefore seen as an act of bad faith.

The SMPAC currently pays £3,000 pa rent to the council which is made up from shares paid by the constituent clubs and the proceeds from hiring out the hall. The committee is currently in negotiation with the council to renew the lease. Those negotiations have been testing and the constituent clubs have become disaffected with the present arrangements. In addition to managing the facility the SMPAC also provides a booking service for the hall, again on a voluntary basis. The imposition of the parking restrictions would undoubtedly result in the loss of the SMPAC committee's goodwill and members have already indicate their unwillingness to continue the arrangements so leading to the winding up of the SMPAC. As the SMPAC currently has no lease from the Council that would happen with immediate effect. In that case the council would lose the £3,000 rent paid by the SMPAC, and the rent paid by casual hirings (around £1,500 pa.). Otherwise the council would need to incur the costs of taking over the management of facility directly or close it down.

The SMPAC also negotiates and manages the lease with the Peter Rabbit nursery for their hire of the hall. Should the SMPAC winds up, that responsibility would immediately revert to the council which would need to negotiate a lease directly and immediately with the nursery. Otherwise the council would lose the £8,000 rent paid by the nursery and attract considerable adverse publicity if the nursery could not continue.

Summary

In summary the introduction of these restrictions and charges is regarded by the SMPAC as unnecessary because the problems they are intended to solve simply do not exist in Sutherland Memorial Park. They are draconian in that they will apply for 7 days a week until 8pm and will levy charges that are in excess of many parking charge levels that apply in the town centre, especially on Sundays. They will penalise the amenities clubs, who are legitimate users of the park, very possibly to the extent of driving them out.

Their effect will be to transform a position where the facility is not only managed at no cost to the Council *and* generates an income for the council, to one where that income will largely disappear and the Council will either have incur costs to directly manage the facility, or close it down.

In that case the council stands to lose around £13,500 annual income, plus a further possible £8,000 from the nursery, incur new costs of managing the amenities facility directly, and generate considerable adverse publicity.

The SMPAC therefore urges the Council to cancel the introduction of these parking proposals in Sutherland Park because they are neither needed or justified. Or to recognize the member clubs as legitimate users of the Park who should therefore be exempted from the restrictions.

Geoff Sheldon
Chair

Sutherland Memorial Park Amenities Club committee
15 June 2018

- 1 The SMPAC was established to manage the Memorial hall facility. It comprises the bowling, football and tennis clubs that use the park. The SMPAC leases the hall from the Guildford Borough and manages hall booking. In return the clubs have free access to the hall and its facilities. The rent is found from the shares paid by each constituent and income from hall hire. The committee is comprised of representatives from each club and the council. The SMPAC is an entirely voluntary body.