

## **The Thomas Hardy Visitor Centre/Café, traffic and the DCC Travel Plan**

In the lead up to the opening of the visitor centre/café and since its opening, a great deal has been done to make things easier for car drivers: the car park has been extended and clearly set out; the approach road has been widened; passing places have been established in Cuckoo Lane and direction signs set up.

All of these have worked and, added to the attraction of the new visitor centre/café have, as the lottery fund bid expected, brought a great many visitors to Higher Bockhampton. In fact so many as to cause regular congestion in the car park and the approach roads.

The DCC travel plan expected visitor numbers of 70,000 a year and the numbers of cars to remain similar to before the Hardy café was built. Those numbers, in a traffic census of 2011 declared that maximum occupancy of the car park was 20 cars and that building the café/visitor centre would only increase traffic by 9 cars a day or 3 in the busiest hour. In the light of this year's experience (as set out in page three), this expectation is clearly risible. Particularly when one considers the numbers of people visiting in the other four months of the year or outside the six hours I have surveyed.

The result of the increased traffic is that there are times, particularly on sunny Sundays and school holidays when the car park is full, when the passing places on Cuckoo Lane and the grass verges are full of parked cars, and tempers run high.

Not only is Cuckoo Lane narrow, but the approach roads to the car park are very narrow, the corner is tight and the road from the café to the car park is used as a car park overflow. This makes it very difficult for cars to enter when others are leaving or to leave when others are entering. It can become tense and heated, not the country experience people are looking for. The result is that visitors to the cottage complain that the car park is full of walkers, the walkers complain that the car park is full of visitors to the café and so on.

The traffic and the traffic congestion has made it much more difficult and more unpleasant for the pedestrians making their way from car park to café or cottage to car park, for the many horse riders and cyclists making their way to Puddletown forest and for local residents.

Because of the congestion, workers in the café and cottage volunteers use the car parks behind the cottage and behind the café. This traffic, as well as deliveries to and refuse collections from the café has resulted in the gradual disintegration of the lower part of the bridleway to the extent that after rain, the ruts, puddles and potholes have made it virtually impassable by wheelchairs and, frequently, by pedestrians.

Of course, planning permission in 2012 for the café/visitor centre was contingent upon there being a travel plan and that plan being implemented. I note that the plan as written in 2012 was altered in 2014, presumably to make its implementation easier, though the revised plan wasn't visible to the public until spring 2015 and, as far as I can see, still isn't on the web site.

Questions I would like to ask now that the Visitor Centre/Café has been open for a whole season.

Since it was written how far has the travel plan progressed?

What issues has the monitoring programme thrown up?

What else can be done to relieve the pressure of traffic?

Should there be at least one more disabled parking bay?

What can be done to rescue the bridleway?

Monitoring of the travel plan is to be achieved partly through collection of data: numbers using the car park, numbers entering the visitor centre, proportions of people arriving by other means of transport, people using footpaths, comparison of arrival patterns on similar dates in different years, starting in 2012. Data to be analysed and reported. Can we now see those analyses and reports?

Photosurveys were to be undertaken to show state of footpaths, hedgerows and the bridleway. Can we now see those photographs and the consequent reports?

Ten questions on the travel plan, particularly on the sections designed to reduce car traffic. (Ignoring such matters as 'Tramper Buggies', 'Phototrails' 'Friends of Thorncombe scheme' etc and such matters as make it easier for car drivers.)

Initially there was to be "a signposted and interpreted route from parking at Kingston Maurward College" by end of 2013 to persuade people to park and walk. That was changed to "discussions underway (sic)." How far have those discussions gone? Can we see minutes of those meetings?

In the same way there was to be a "network of paths, joining Hardy related properties and sites", there was to be "provision of cycle hire at Kingston Maurward College" and there was to be a 'Green shuttle bus linking Hardy sites and Dorchester.'" These were all to start in 2014. It is now the end of 2015. How far have discussions gone and can we see the minutes of meetings on all three of these projects?

Links were to be made with train and taxi services: joint promotions, joint tickets, standardised and publicised fares and discounts for local taxi services. "Have a day out without the car" projects with Kingston Maurward" How far have discussions gone towards those? Can we see minutes of recent meetings?

A key method of reducing traffic was to be the installation of pay and display parking machines with no parking on access roads. Initially this was to be in place by 2014. Later amended to Spring 2015. In November 2015 it hasn't been done. Was this not intended to be taken seriously?

Cycle to work schemes and car sharing schemes were to be promoted to encourage workers and volunteers not to drive. The car parks behind the café/visitor centre and the cottage always have workers/volunteers cars in them. Sometimes as many as ten. What promotion has been done? And why has it proved so ineffective?

There are twenty action points in the travel plan. Cycle racks are in place. Are any of the other 19? In the three years since the action plan was first proposed, what has actually been achieved, in terms of reducing the numbers of visits made by car?

## Numbers of visitors Higher Bockhampton car park March - October 2015

Date	Time	Weather	Going in	Going out	No in car park
Sun 7.3.15	11-12.00		37	29	39 (12.00)
Mon 23.3.15	2-3.00		19	32	32 (3.00)
Fri 3.4.15	12 -1.00	Dry	46	29	38 (1.00)
Thu 9.4.15	3-4.00		15	43	17 (4.00)
Fri 24.4.15	2.00-3.00	Dry	41	53	51 (3.00)
Sat 2.5.15	10.30-11.30	Dry	43	22	38 (11.30)
Wed 13.5.15	12-1.00	Dismal	23	18	22 (1.00)
Mon 25.5.15	3-4.00	Dry	13	23	18 (4.00)
Wed 3.6.15	12.30-1.30	Dry/cool	39	37	41 (1.30)
Sun 14.6.15	1-2.00	Dry/nice	66	72	71 (2.00)
Thu 18.6.15	11-12.00	Dry	61	46	55 (12.00)
Wed 24.6.15	10-11.00	Dry	53	32	41 (11.00)
Fri 10.7.15	12-1.00	Warm sunny	45	46	54 (1.00)
Sat 25.7.15	1.30-2.30	Cool	67	82	76 (2.30)
Mon 3.8.15	2.00-3.00	Dry/warm	43	48	51 (3.00)
Fri 7.8.15	11-12.00	Dry warm	68	45	69 (12.00)
Tue 25.8.15	10.30 - 11.30	Dry	36	21	33 (11.30)
Wed 2.9.15	3 - 4.00	Dry	18	58	23 (4.00)
Thu 24.9.15	1.00-2.00	Dry	52	63	55 (2.00)
Sun 3.10.15	2-3.00	Dry	47	87	76 (3.00)
Sat 31.10.15	11 -12.00	Dry	53	41	59 (12.00)

Average number of cars per hour going in = **42.14**

Average number of cars per hour leaving = **44.14**

Average number of cars in the car park = **44.81**

Average number of people per car **2.7**

Average number of cars per day (Average arriving hour x 6hours) = **253**

Average number of people per day (average cars per day x 2.7) = **685**

Number of visitors during the eight months (daily cars x 246) = **168,510**

Obviously visitor numbers vary according to the weather, to the time of year, to the time of day and the day of the week. There are a lot more on sunny weekends during school holidays. That's why I have surveyed throughout the eight months of summer, on different days of the week at different times. There are few cars in the car park before ten a.m. and few after five p.m.