

School parking meeting. Weds 1 December, 6pm via Zoom

Present:

Great Milton Parish Council:

Cllr Bill Fox (Vice-Chair), Tim Darch (Clerk).

Recreation Ground Committee: James Cunningham (Chair).

Great Milton Primary School:

Alyson Frost (Headteacher), Chris Matthews (Parent Governor).

Background

James Cunningham initially advised of a previously negative view from the Rec Committee on the use of the Recreation Ground for parking, in light of issues with simultaneous entry/exit, the risk of accidents resulting from cars manoeuvring and the Trust's basis that the Rec is only for activities associated with recreational use.

Alyson Frost advised that there are currently 185 pupils on the school roll including 20 Afghan refugees, with a maximum of around 200. Only 30 pupils live in Great Milton, with 81 in the catchment and therefore entitled to school transport, meaning that 84 are non-entitled due to being out of catchment. Additionally, of those entitled to transport some do not make use of it for various reasons including SEN issues, work patterns and some parents who feel their children are too young to travel on a bus.

Car sharing has reduced since schools have fully reopened due primarily to concerns over infection spread and changes to work patterns. There is a 20-minute drop-off window, during which staff are positioned to receive pupils; they can also be picked from the end of the drive after school with permission. Staggered pick-up times have been considered to dilute the impact of vehicle numbers, but this may mean some cars staying longer than they currently do if parents have multiple children in different year groups.

The school has addressed the parking issue every term in its newsletters. The suggestion of parking further away has apparently been heeded by some but has just moved the problem further from the school. The request for residents to offer driveway spaces has had limited success, with Bill Fox possibly the only current provider.

James Cunningham calculated around 40 to 50 cars dropping off or picking up from the school each day

Discussion of possible solutions

James Cunningham suggested potentially reducing the width of the village greens to create more space for parking, though with an awareness that this was unlikely to be popular with residents.

Bill Fox asked if 'crocodiles'/walking buses from The Bull car park and Potts Close had been considered by the school, as suggested at the last school parking meeting. Alyson Frost confirmed that this had not been pursued due to the need for parent volunteers, along with insufficient staffing capacity. However, there may be scope to use the pub car park for parking, with parents walking their children to school from there.

Bill Fox asked whether a single member of school staff could monitor the main gate into the Recreation Ground if parking were possible there, to marshal vehicles given the 'one in/one out' access arrangement. Alyson Frost replied that this could be possible.

James Cunningham suggested the possibility of adding additional parking spaces in the Recreation Ground via grant funding which could potentially benefit sports clubs and other recreational users, and possibly also be used for school-related parking.

Chris Matthews suggested possibly using a human presence to ask people to not park in critical locations (e.g. opposite the shop), or alternatively yellow lines with potential camera enforcement. An appeal to the County Council for improved bus services was also suggested and supported, but Tim Darch reported that there is not currently sufficient funding for new bus services at OCC, though a bid for central government funding if successful may lead to improvements in the next year or so.

Tim Darch suggested possibly relocating staff parking to the Rec, with the benefit of 'one-way traffic' (arrivals a.m, departures p.m). This would free up the school drive and car park for drop-off and pick-up purposes. Alyson Frost suggested that the school drive could also potentially be widened to enable two-way vehicle movements, while James Cunningham advised that an area of land in front of Tanners Cottage also belongs to the school should it be needed.

Bill Fox asked whether, finance permitting, the school would consider relocating all or part of the current school play area to the open field next to the tennis court, and then using the play area thus freed up for parent parking? The Parish Council would be prepared to accept a surrender of the current relatively short-term lease of this area, and grant OCC a much longer lease (maybe 25 years) to give the County Council a longer period over which to amortise the expenditure required to relocate the play equipment and surface the new car park. This would be a similar arrangement to that for the area upon which the school have now erected their latest modular classroom.

James Cunningham reported past initiatives when preparing the bid for the proposed children's centre, which included parking at Coombe Farm on Chilworth Road (though this was not well received), and using The Bull car park and Pitts Green triangle.

ACTIONS

James Cunningham to raise the use of the Recreation Ground for 1) parent parking and 2) staff parking with the Rec Committee in January.

Alyson Frost to discuss more formal car sharing arrangements with Wheatley parents (from where many school-related car journeys originate), and to consider the suggestion of giving up some land within the school boundary for car parking. Alyson also proposed suggesting to OCC that the PAN (Pupil Admission Number) could be capped at 25 to minimise the risk of further increases.

Bill Fox to discuss the possibility of using The Bull's car park for parent parking.