

**ST NEOTS RIVERSIDE PARK – ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR
(Joint Report by the Heads of Environment & Transport
and Community Services)**

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To consider the needs for works at the St Neots Riverside Car Park to combat anti-social behaviour.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The District Council owns and manages the car park which is situated adjacent to the Town Bridge and serves the park and the town centre. Under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act, it has a duty to ensure that its activities and policies are addressing community safety issues.
- 2.2 Complaints have been received from a considerable number of different agencies and local residents with regard to young people gathering in their cars in the car park from 7pm until 2/3 am. The behaviour that has been reported is that of loud music from their car stereos and racing/spinning the cars around the car park area. During the warmer evenings this also attracts younger people to the vicinity and under age drinking takes place with the associated side effects.
- 2.3 The lighting in the car park is below the now recommended minimum for CCTV, meaning that it is not possible to identify number plates or people in the hours of darkness.
- 2.4 The Parks Service had a security contractor closing the gate to the car park each night at 12pm and opening at 6am. This was stopped in 2001 as it could no longer be funded from the existing budgets. The Police took on the responsibility on a temporary basis for the operation of closing the gate, but this has been on an, as and when required basis, and if they are available. This is an ad-hoc arrangement which is clearly unsatisfactory, and on several occasions it has resulted in the car park not being opened in the mornings with traffic chaos around the adjacent streets. The car park needs to be open in the evening to allow access to the Pizza Parlour/restaurant as well as for those who park there and access the town centre.

3. ACTIONS TO DATE

- 3.1 A number of meetings have been held with the Police to discuss the problems that have been occurring. As a result of the discussions, an operation led by the Police was carried out in the area to address the problems associated with the anti-social behaviour. As a result, a number of Section 59s were issued to those that were found to be using their vehicle anti-socially. Once issued with a Section 59, if the driver or vehicle are found to be involved in another anti-social incident in the following three months, then fines will be issued.

3.1 Cont'd

If these fines cannot or are not paid within the identified timescale then the vehicle can be crushed. However, the police cannot attend the car park every evening to check the compliance.

3.2 Speed reduction ramps, removed to allow resurfacing of the car park to be undertaken, are being re-installed to stop the racing around the car park.

3.3 However until the car park can be secured at set times with a permanent barrier, the issues remain.

4. **FURTHER OPTIONS:**

4.1 A study is being carried out to ascertain the main times that the anti-social behaviour takes place. This is using CCTV evidence, local reports and information from the Police. This work is not complete yet. However, it is clear that the existing lighting levels should be increased to CCTV standards. This has been costed at £30,000 (capital).

4.2 The use of the Police to open and close the gate is not a long term solution. The use of the security firm to close the gate at 12pm and open it at 6am (4am on Thursdays for the Market) could be recommenced. The cost of this service is approximately £10k per year revenue.

4.3 An automatic barrier or bollards with exit controls could be installed at the entrance which would stop entry after 12pm, but allow people to leave when they wish. It will also stop bonafide users from using the car park and would reduce access to the restaurant. A timer would be included in the package so that the timings can varied. This would cost about £15k capital, and there will also be a revenue cost of around £3k per year for a maintenance contract and repairs which could be met from the car park revenue budget. Further barriers could be constructed throughout the car park to divide it and to give the facility to close areas earlier in the evening. This would be expensive to construct and require extra attendance to close and open with associated costs.

4.4 The new car parking orders allow the car park attendants to issue penalty notices to cars in the car park, which are not there solely for parking. This would need to be carried out after normal working hours which is when the anti-social behaviour takes place. If the attendants were to issue penalty tickets in the evening there could be a risk attached, as well as increased costs.

4.5 The Environment Agency are proposing to carry out flood alleviation works for the adjacent properties in The Paddocks and will include a new flood bank between the car park and the road. This work does mean that the entrance road will need to be rebuilt with a hump in it and may have to be realigned. The installation of any barrier system could only be carried out after this was complete. The work is programmed for starting in September 2005 with completion by December.

- 4.6 Any work which is carried out to reduce the nuisance problem, may just result in it being transferred to another car park or public place. The Police will still need to actively control the problem and the situation monitored by them and our Community Safety team.

5. PROPOSALS

- 5.1 It order to reduce the anti-social behaviour problem at the Riverside Park, it is proposed that:

- The lighting be improved in the car park
- The barrier system be investigated and designed, so that it can be installed once the flood bank work is complete.
- Until the barriers are operational, a security firm be employed to open and close the existing gates.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Funding for the works will be needed. Some of this can be met from existing budgets, but extra funding will be needed for the remainder.

- The lighting will cost £30k. There is a Crime and Disorder – Lighting Improvements budget which can contribute £15k this year towards these costs. The remaining £15k (capital) can not be funded from existing budgets without affecting other schemes.
- The employment of the security firm until December can be funded from existing leisure revenue budgets as can the ongoing maintenance/repair costs of £3k per year.
- The provision of the barrier system (£15k capital) cannot be covered from existing budgets.

- 6.2 There are savings on other capital schemes highlighted in the Capital Programme Monitoring report, elsewhere on the agenda, and so a budget transfer could be made to fund the extra capital provision needed for this scheme.

- 6.3 The revenue impact of the whole scheme would, therefore, be as follows:

	2005/ 2006	2006/ 2007 onwards
	£000	£000
Cost of lighting (£30k capital)	0.8	1.6
Provision of barrier (£15k capital)	0.4	0.8
Maintenance/running costs	3.0	3.0
Total	4.2	5.4
Proposed Funding		
Existing budget (£15k capital)	0.4	0.8
Existing budget (£3k revenue)	3.0	3.0
Capital budget transfer (£30k capital)	0.8	1.6

7. RECOMMENDATION

7.1 Cabinet are recommended to approve:

- (a) the proposed works at Riverside Car Park, St Neots
- (b) the transfer of £30k capital budget from savings on other schemes

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Environment and Transport files.

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