

Report to	-	Cabinet
Date	-	15 January 2018
Report of the	-	Executive Director of Business Operations
Subject	-	Camber Traffic and Parking Management

Recommendation: It be **RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) the work undertaken to address traffic congestion in Camber be noted;
 - 2) the implementation of a two year trial of an Automatic Number Plate Recognition payment system for Camber Western car park be approved, with costs to be met from car park reserves;
 - 3) the Community Safety Partnership Joint Action Group be requested to fund a Variable Messaging Sign for traffic management to be owned and operated by Rother District Council; and
 - 4) if problems continue, Sussex Police and East Sussex County Council's highways authority be asked to take measures to close the road or restrict the number of vehicles entering the village during exceptional peak days.
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Service Manager: Brenda Mason

Lead Cabinet Member: Councillor Lord Amptill

Introduction

1. For a number of years Camber has experienced periodic traffic congestion and parking issues caused by the influx of visitors to Camber's sandy beaches on the hottest days of the year. Although these peaks occur on a maximum of 4 to 6 days a year they cause significant disruption to residents, visitors and local bus services, leading to frustration and complaints. Importantly, Sussex Police, East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service and the South East Coast Ambulance Service report access issues on these peak days leading to delays in emergency response times.
2. Following significant traffic congestion on two days in the early summer of 2017, Camber Parish Council (CPC) formally requested that Rother District Council (RDC) work to identify potential solutions. In response to this request RDC, in conjunction with Sussex Police and East Sussex County Council (ESCC) as the highways authority, commissioned consultants to undertake a traffic management study. This study was equally funded between the three agencies.
3. This report brings forward the findings of the study for Members' consideration and, in response to its recommendations, proposes the trial of a new parking system in Western car park and the acquisition of a variable messaging sign to inform car drivers of parking conditions at the beach.

Camber Traffic and Parking Study

4. Transport Planning Associates (TPA) were appointed in August 2017 to provide expert consultancy services on the traffic and parking issues in Camber. The scope of the work covered the following requirements:
 - An investigation into the causes of traffic congestion at Camber to find practical solutions.
 - Recommendations to ensure greater control on the corridors of movement, smoothing or diverting traffic flow.
 - A review of existing car parking provision and management and recommendations for improvements to help alleviate on-street congestion.
 - Recommendations to ensure the emergency services and public services are able to travel through the village and access the beach unimpeded.
5. As part of the information-gathering stage of their survey and report, TPA held a meeting with key operational stakeholders, including officers from RDC, Sussex Police, ESCC and CPC. They conducted site visits to familiarise themselves with the area and collated background research, gathering primary data as well as anecdotal evidence. Discussions were held with West Wittering beach management team, a coastal area with similar conditions and visitor numbers, to compare their practice. TPA attended site on the August bank holiday, a moderately busy day.
6. From desk top study and primary observations, TPA produced a detailed traffic and parking study, available in the Members' Room and online at <http://www.rother.gov.uk/article/12999/Monday-15-January-2018>. The study highlighted the following key areas as potential causes for traffic congestion:
 - Delays in accessing car parks
 - Overall lack of car parking capacity
 - Poor signage
 - Illegal and inconsiderate parking
 - Sheer volume of traffic seeking to get to the beach
7. It was noted that the parking capacity and congestion problems experienced in Camber was an issue, experienced in a number of seaside locations around the country. It was also noted that the control of traffic volumes and flow into the village centre was essential in reducing congestion. The use of pay on entry charging system at the car parks was pinpointed as a cause of tailbacks as cars queue at the entry kiosks to pay for parking.
8. TPA presented their report to the joint agencies on the 5 December 2017. A panel of officers from the Council, Sussex Police and ESCC discussed a range of solutions in response to the highlighted key areas of concern. The panel made the following conclusions:
 - a) To reduce entry time to Western car park and consequent traffic queues, the Council should consider installing an Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) entry and payment system. Automated registration of car park users is used to monitor payment and enforce charging regimes.

Car park users pay at machines using card or cash either when they have found a space to park or on exit. The study notes that car park service suppliers have indicated that installation and on-going maintenance of an ANPR system could be passed to them, using enforcement income to offset costs. Officers noted that, along with a number of operational concerns, under such a system there is a risk that overall income from the Camber car parks may reduce as vehicles would not be required to pay on entry to the car park. Currently the pay on entry ensures every car pays.

- b) The study recommends that additional parking provision in the Camber area would reduce inconsiderate on-street parking and congestion. However concerns were raised that Camber beach was already at capacity on peak days and accommodating more visitors would have a detrimental effect on beach safety, enjoyment and environmental protection. The panel therefore recommended that an increase in parking capacity in Camber is not taken further at this time.
- c) Currently a manual signage system is in place notifying drivers that parking is full along the A21 and A259 main access routes into Camber. This system relies on local residents deploying signs on the request of the Coastal Officer. It was recommended that RDC provides a further dot-matrix variable messaging sign (VMS) to be strategically located on the route into Camber advising on traffic congestion and parking availability. VMS signage would be supplemented by the use of social and other media by RDC, with a communications plan being put into place.
- d) The management of illegal and inconsiderate parking is the responsibility of ESCC Highways Authority and Sussex Police. A number of measures within the report were discussed including the installation of flexible verge markers, additional yellow lines and civil parking enforcement. ESCC confirmed that due to safety issues, installation costs and on-going maintenance requirements, flexible markers could not be installed. ESCC also confirmed that any relining of double yellow lines or additional areas to be included in a new traffic order scheme would not be recommended or undertaken until the outcome of Civil Parking Enforcement was concluded.
- e) Sussex Police advised that on peak days three officers are deployed to Camber and funded by RDC through the Operation Radcott. These officers assist with parking congestion and issue enforcement notices on occasion. However as the officers prioritise public safety on the beach and foreshore they are not always available for traffic management. Additional police resources to manage traffic congestion and illegal parking would only be deployed after a daily risk, threat and harm assessment and had to be measured alongside the needs of the rest of the district. For these reasons the Police confirmed that it was unlikely there would be any change to the deployment of police officers to enforce parking restrictions.

Way Forward

- 9. In taking forward the proposal for changing the system of payment at Western car park a number of legal, financial and operational concerns would need to be addressed. Officers will work with suppliers to determine the best approach covering the following concerns:

- a) Safety of those on foot, particularly children, in the car park.
 - b) Advice and guidance to visitors, including dog control and directing visitors to the extreme sports zone.
 - c) Legal issues connected to the Car Park Order.
 - d) Legal and other data issues connected to ANPR.
 - e) Non-payment and other parking abuses.
 - f) Maintenance of equipment.
 - g) Environmental protection including litter and reduction of signage clutter.
10. It is recommended that the new system be trialled without capital or significant revenue outlay and without obligation for permanent deployment. It is suggested that two seasons would be a suitable period to evaluate the impact, subject to supplier agreement. After this period officers will report back on the impacts, both positive and negative, of the move to automated car park management. If the trial achieves its objectives of reducing traffic queues without adverse consequences, officers will consider the rollout of such systems in other car parks in Camber and around the district. A report will be brought back to Cabinet at a future date after the summer season 2019. During the trial period seasonal staff will still be appointed to oversee the operation and safeguard visitors on their way to the beach.
11. Taking forward the VMS proposal, officers will source a suitable supplier and seek funding through the Community Safety Partnership Joint Action Group. Messages on the VMS can be changed remotely allowing for a flexible response to congestion or any other incident. In retaining responsibility for the deployment of the VMS, the Coastal Officer and his team will be able to maximise the use of the signage function in conjunction with the fixed VMS capability installed in the car parks in 2017.

Conclusion

12. The Camber Traffic and Parking Study by TPA provides the Council and other stakeholders with useful recommendations for improvements to traffic and parking management in Camber. With these improvements in place it may help alleviate problems encountered by the village on those exceptional days. If the problems continue to occur then the village will need to look to the police and highways authority to take control on the volumes of traffic entering Camber by perhaps closing the road or the need for ESCC highway infrastructure solutions to prevent illegal parking. We are reliant solely on Sussex Police to enact temporary road closures or traffic diversions.
13. Officers have sought expert advice and local opinion in proposing the recommended changes to the parking system. Whilst pay on entry has had significant benefits in car park management over the years, new technology potentially offers the prospect of addressing some of the congestion issues consequent on the popularity of Camber as a tourism destination. In the longer term, it will be useful to take a strategic approach to visitor management, encouraging visitors to explore other nearby destinations and dispersing visitor volumes on the busiest days. This requires a partnership and officers are grateful for the co-operation of Police, ESCC and CPC in bringing this report forward.

Risk Assessment Statement

While the number of occasions of traffic congestion in Camber is few, it does create problems for villagers, visitors and the emergency services. Therefore, the main risk in deferring action on the traffic and parking issues at Camber is one of public safety, particularly in access for emergency vehicles. It is incumbent on the Council to consider and, where reasonable and practicable, implement measures to help mitigate traffic congestion in Camber village.

There is potential for any measures put in place not to have the desired impact on traffic congestion as the Council has limited powers to control the numbers of vehicles coming into the area or where drivers chose to park.