

Name of person submitting the question: James Hyatt

Member to whom the question is to be put: Councillor Hazel Timpe

Questions

1. Given that RDC were warned prior to implementing the 'trial' of the highly likely financial damage it would have on numerous businesses in Camber and having failed to consult with businesses beforehand, also failing to take out an impact assessment, is there a case or would RDC consider out of goodwill to offer compensation to the businesses in some form? Maybe liken it to the grants in COVID (this has been far more damaging than COVID to Camber's businesses) some of those businesses including ours are now in a precarious position that we have previously never experienced in 39 years of trading in Camber.
2. It has been stated one of the reasons RDC brought in the trial was to generate more funds to cover the upkeep of Camber and not burden the tax payer, would it have not been better to carry out the work on the central car park overflow (Johnson's field) for a combined cost of £20,000 as was the quote given by a local builder? Can RDC assure they will get the overflow up and running for next season and give the businesses a much needed leg up, which let's be fair, the central end needs, especially going on that central only holds 160 vehicles compared to the western car parks 1,400 vehicles?
3. As soon as it was apparent the trial wasn't working and causing vast financial damage to businesses and being counter productive in every other aspect, we have to wonder why RDC decided to persevere with the trial? By proceeding with it, it's caused speculation between businesses and villagers alike that there is a possible ulterior motive i.e. was it done purposefully to dishearten the businesses, maybe financially damage them or more. It's a valid and concerning view to hold given RDC plans to tender out a cafeteria of sorts to be built within the proposed new toilet block in central. Can RDC assure us this is not the case?

Answers

1. The Council is not in a position to compensate businesses for loss of income during the 2023 season as there are many factors that can impact seasonal businesses and the cost of parking is just one element.

The businesses in the centre of Camber do not only rely on those parking in Camber Central and Old Lydd Road car parks for custom. Local residents, holiday park visitors, and those staying in the village and walking to the beach all contribute, as do those who park elsewhere and walk to these facilities.

2023 saw the sixth wettest July on record and this had a direct impact on the number of day-trippers visiting Camber. During the trial period, 27 days were recorded by onsite Coastal staff as wet, overcast, and windy. Coastal Officers forecast each day at Camber as red, amber, or green, assessing likely visitor numbers and resource requirements dependant on weather conditions and Camber did not experience any 'red' days during this trial period. There were 8 'red' days during the same period in 2022.

2. As noted, one of the reasons the Council brought in the trial was to ensure visitors make an appropriate contribution to the ever-increasing cost of running the beach.

Rother District Council does not own Johnson's Field – we have a lease arrangement with East Sussex Council whereby we have shared any profits from parking on the site in previous years. Both the revetment and the surface require significant investment and repair if Johnson's field is to be used in the future. Whilst we appreciate the local builder's estimate of £20,000, contractors who have assessed the site on behalf of ESCC and RDC estimate the work will cost significantly more. At this time, neither council has the available funds to invest in this scheme however this will be kept under review.

3. As previously outlined, with any trial, it is important to collate data and review over a period of time. The Council's motives for the trial were transparent – to attempt to reduce congestion, and to ensure visitors were fairly contributing to the costs of running the beach. There was not and is not any ulterior motive to financially damage the existing businesses. The Council will continue to look into options for meeting these objectives but there is no straightforward answer.

A common question from residents asks why the Council does not close the road to all except residents when Camber is "full". East Sussex County Council is the Highways Authority however they advise that there is no ability under the highways act to restrict certain vehicles from the public highway. The Police are not authorised to close roads other than in an emergency such as a road traffic accident. Rother District Council is not a Highways Authority and as such has no powers to close roads due to congestion.

The other most frequently suggested solution is for the Council to offer a "park and ride" scheme. Unfortunately, this is not a cost-effective solution at present. The Council would need to hire vehicles and pay for drivers throughout the season and rent a suitable parking site. The cost of using the scheme would need to be low enough to entice visitors, who often wish to park as close to the destination as possible and usually bring additional items such as wind breaks, inflatables, toys, and food and drink with them to use on the beach. Unless coupled with a road closure, it is likely that these buses would simply add to the congestion on busy days and be running empty or near empty at other times.