

North Petherton Community Centre Car Park

The Trustees of the North Petherton Community Centre wish it to be known that, after considerable debate, they plan to install an Automatic Number Plate Recognition system to address ongoing problems being experienced with the operation of the Community Centre car park. This document provides the background to this decision and how it is proposed to operate the scheme.

Introduction

The North Petherton Community Centre was built with the help of donations from a variety of sources, local fundraising and appeals, on land at Fore Street, leased earlier from Sedgemoor District Council in November 1983 to the Trustees of the North Petherton Community Centre. The Trustees are elected annually and comprise elected and representative members who are all volunteers.

The lease defines the requirements that the Community Centre has to meet as a minimum, and how it had to be approved and in use within 28 years of the original agreement date. Following the first AGM after completion of the building the Trustees had to vest the property in the Official Custodian for Charities, but the Trustees continue to be responsible for the operation of the building.

Lease requirements

The requirements of particular concern are those relating to the management and maintenance of the car park within the leased land:

Clause 3(7) *Not to cause or permit or suffer to be caused on the premises anything which may be or become a nuisance or to do or suffer to be done anything whatsoever thereon which may be an annoyance or cause damage to the Council and/or any neighbouring owners or occupiers.*

Clause 5(7) *The Lessees shall retain the existing car parking areas for public use at all reasonable hours and may move the public car parking area to an alternative location within the premises, with the Council's consent for a dual purpose car park serving both the needs of the shopping public and those of the users of the community and village hall.*

The original car park referred to in clause 5(7) above was a small car park fronting onto Hammet Street with alternative access from the main entrance via the small bridge. This land was surrendered back to the Council in September 2005 and subsequently sold. Some of the proceeds of that sale were used to tarmac the main car park we have today.

Problems Experienced

1. Balancing the needs of the users of the Community Centre with the needs of those using local amenities and local shops has always been difficult. The needs of the former have to take precedence as they are the main source of income.
2. Misuse of the car park by members of the public, using it as a free car park for long periods as a commuter car park, going on excursions using Berry's / National Express coaches and as a free parking space for their personal use.

3. Misuse of the car park by younger users, using it as a meeting place, particularly in the evenings and at weekends causing a nuisance with over revving engines, loud music and language that could be considered to be offensive.
4. This last form of nuisance also violates the requirements of clause 3(7) of our lease and we have no means of controlling this except by notifying the police. This normally results in only a temporary stay of the problem. In the summer this type of disturbance sometimes occurs into the early hours of the morning.

Proposed Solution

Over the past 10 or more years many methods for controlling both the use and misuse of the car park have been considered. All to date have been impracticable to implement within the restriction of our volunteer resource or are too costly to install and implement.

The ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) based system is the only solution we have seen that has the capability of controlling the use of the car park for users of the hall, while allowing public use at reasonable times and limiting the misuse of the car park.

The initial proposal is for the following:

1. 2 hours free parking, providing reasonable time for attending the doctor's surgery, church, local shops and amenities. Return within 1 hour would be prohibited.
2. For those needing to park for longer, £1.00 per hour payable at a machine located in the car park. Users would have the option to pay £5.00 to park all day up to 20:00hrs (the proposed closing time for public use of the car park).
3. Visitors attending events in the Community Centre would enter their car registration number on a terminal in the building, which would then exempt them from any charges.
4. Cars exceeding the prescribed limits would be fined by the operating company.
5. Clear signage will explain the tariffs and terms of use of the car park.
6. Free car parking for certain events (e.g. church fete, local flower show) would be permitted.

Advantages

The distinct advantages of this system to the Community Centre Management are that the operator will install the system for free, will operate and maintain it and will rely on the income from fines to cover the cost of their investment. The operating company will also pursue the payment of fines by legal means, meaning the Trustees will not be involved in the recovery of due penalties. The Community Centre will receive a share of the monies collected from the ticket machine, to be used to maintain the car park.

We consider the above proposal to be a reasonable and fair way of meeting the requirements needed to comply with our lease as well as the needs of the general public.