

OPEN LETTER FROM THE EARLSWOOD COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT GROUP (ECIAG)

Dear Residents of Earlswood

Like many beauty spots across the country Earlswood Lakes attracts a wide variety of visitors the vast majority of whom come to enjoy the surroundings peacefully and are respectful to the area. However, there has been significant evidence that some who travel to the area do so with the intention to behave in a manner that is unacceptable.

Warwickshire Police has recorded a significant rise in incidents of antisocial behaviour in recent years. This has caused genuine distress to local residents and an increase to the demand for Police resources. The majority of recorded incidents have occurred with vehicles during the evenings and early hours. These incidents have included car cruising, drug use within vehicles, loitering, excess noise and incidents of public order and criminal damage.

To address this issue, In June 2020 The Office of the Police and Crime commissioner brought partners together for a Case Review Conference. Following this Warwickshire Police continued this work by bringing together a group of partners with those organisations who hold a statutory responsibility to reduce crime under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder act 1988. This include representatives from Warwickshire County Council, Stratford on Avon District Council and the Office for the Police and Crime Commissioner. Also included were partners with a vested interest in the area including the Canal and River Trust, Tanworth in Arden Parish Council and has included the local residents association. (The ECIAG)

The principal aim of the group is to work in partnership to explore and implement measures that could potentially reduce the anti-social behaviour. Each partner within the group has an equal voice and decisions are made jointly with the sole intention to improve the quality of life for residents in the area.

Whilst the Public space protection order (PSPO) and CCTV are useful tools to allow Police to deal with offences in the area it is important to explore these further measures for two reasons. Firstly, because it should always be the primary aim of responsible organisations to try and prevent offences before they occur. Secondly, whilst the incidents described above and the frequency of them have undoubtedly had a significant impact upon residents; when taken in isolation most would be considered to carry a lower level of threat, risk and harm comparable to other incidents across the county. The reality of this is that Police will never be in a position to respond to incidents as they would like to, regardless of their proximity or resourcing, because Police resources are deployed based on the level of threat, risk and harm.

As work progressed it became apparent that the common denominator in the majority of incidents was the Causeway itself and that the only viable measure that could potentially resolve the issues would be the closure of this section of road to vehicular traffic. The Causeway is a unique feature to the area and evidence suggests that this attracts perpetrators of antisocial behaviour to the area. Both due to the design of the causeway itself and the loop created between Valley Road, Malthouse Lane, Springbrook Lane and Earlswood Common.

Finding permanent solutions that are affective, viable and cost effective is, in any situation, a difficult task and the group has considered an extensive list of proposals over a sustained period of time. This unprecedented level of focus on the area has resulted in significant effort by all partners involved

and it has always been the aim of the group that for solutions to be implemented, a full consultation must be conducted with the community.

The option of an experimental closure of the causeway to vehicular traffic was identified. This option includes a full formal consultation with residents during the period of the closure, and would allow partners to fully assess the effects of a closure on both antisocial behaviour and other matters within the area, with the ability to reverse the closure at any time if warranted. The group unanimously agreed that this option should be taken forward and this was presented to the community at the recent engagement event at Earlswood Village Hall to seek residents' comments on this proposal.

The group are extremely grateful to those of you who were able to attend and those who have contacted us in other ways to provide their invaluable knowledge of the area and opinions on this proposed solution. Following the engagement event the group have met to discuss a number of concerns raised by residents and reassess the data available to us around recorded incidents in the area and try to see if there are any alternative options, or even a way we can combine what we seek to achieve with the strong views held locally to make it less impactful on residents.

As a result of listening to feedback from the community the group has unanimously agreed that we should look to alter the terms of the experimental closure to only prohibit the use of vehicles on the causeway between the hours of 7pm and 7am. We believe/ hope this is likely to achieve a similar impact in preventing or deterring ASB in the area, as the closure focuses on the key times ASB is usually reported. Access will be maintained at all times for emergency vehicles, mobility scooters, cyclists, pedestrians and horses.

There are clearly some further considerations to be made to potentially put this alternative night time experimental closure in place, one specific element being the responsibility to open and close the gates at the relevant time. (This would need to be done manually initially – before being considered as a permanent option as required by the experimental order).

The experimental closure would have the same maximum time span of 18 months and would be maintained under the same proposed continual review with the option to reverse at any time.

The experimental closure will be conducted by Warwickshire County Council Highways and will include a full public consultation. Following the conclusion of the consultation a report will be submitted to the Warwickshire Council Portfolio Holder for Transport & Highways and a decision made as to if the closure to vehicular traffic between these times should be made permanent.

As a group we feel the alterations to the timings of the closure strike the correct balance between allowing partners and the community to establish if the closure has the desired effect of reducing antisocial behaviour in the area without creating unnecessary inconvenience to residents themselves. We also feel that by maintaining vehicular access during the day the area will allow responsible visitors to maintain their presence in the area and provide much needed support to local businesses.

We would like the experimental closure to vehicular traffic between 7pm and 7am to take effect as soon as it is viable to do so and sincerely hope that the community can recognise the partnership effort to really try to tackle the perennial issues experienced, whilst also listen to the community.

We hope to make a further announcements regarding this in due course.

Yours Sincerely,

Inspector Ben Hembry (Warwickshire Police, Chair ECIAG)

Co Signed:

Sergeant David Ebbs, PC Steve Hope (Warks Police), Cllr John Horner, Paul Taylor (Warks County Council), Cllr Tony Dixon, Karin Stanley, Sam Slemensek (Stratford District Council), Gavin Passmore (Canal and River Trust).