



SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL'S LOCAL COMMITTEE IN EPSOM & EWELL

PUBLIC FOOTPATH No.78

24th JANUARY 2005

KEY ISSUE

For the Local Committee to receive an update report on matters relating to public footpath 78, which runs from Waterloo Road, across Hazon Way to Court Recreation Ground (and beyond).

SUMMARY

As reported to Members at the meeting of the Local Committee held on 12 July 2004, a petition containing 67 signatures was received requesting the night-time closure of Footpath No. 78. Members considered a report at the Local Committee on 25 October 2004 and decided that the practical and financial difficulties associated with closing the footpath, in addition to Human Rights issues, meant that closure was not appropriate. The Committee asked for other measures to be investigated to ameliorate the problems experienced by local residents. This report sets out measures taken in relation to monitoring, policing and graffiti removal and considers the question of lighting and CCTV improvements.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS:

Members are asked to note the contents of this report. Any further suggestions from Members to help improve community safety in this area and reduce disorder will be welcomed.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 A petition containing 67 signatures was received from Mr and Mrs G Watson of 105 Hazon Way asking for the alleyways between Waterloo Road, Hazon Way and the Court Recreation Ground to be closed during the night. Residents complained of continual night-time disturbances from “drunken, perhaps drugged gangs, who damage fences and cars, shout, swear and congregate on the seats and underneath the street lamps in the Court Recreation Ground”. The addresses of the signatories included Waterloo Road, Hazon Way, Temple Close, Horsley Close, Gosfield Road and Temple Road.
- 1.2 Following a consultation exercise, a range of objections to closure of the footpath were identified, including:
- That it would create a precedent that wherever anti social behaviour occurs, problem footpaths can be closed, destroying the amenity for the majority. The proposal is impractical, with significant costs for erecting gates, maintenance coupled with the costs of locking and unlocking any gates. How will park users gain access from Hazon Way and what will happen to the cycleway?
 - Inconvenience to pedestrians; problems for residents gaining access to their properties; the police should be asked to include the footpath on their night patrols; to close the recreation ground would involve the erection of costly fencing; the number of gates that would be needed to close off all the accesses which themselves could be subject to vandalism.
 - One resident of Temple Road was concerned that the problems will increase in that road as an alternative route if the footpath is closed.
 - In the context of the Human Rights Act there might be difficulty in demonstrating that closure was a proportionate response and it might be seen to infringe upon the rights of the general public to use the footpath at any time.
 - Some residents’ main access to their own property is from the footpath itself, creating a further complication.
- 1.3 The Local Committee on 25 October decided that it was not appropriate to close the footpath, but asked for the wider issues of policing, lighting, CCTV and graffiti removal to be investigated.

2. Policing

- 2.1 Receipt of the petition coincided with significant reporting of problems of disorder centred on Court Recreation Ground, which resulted in the making of a Section 30 Order. This resulted in a higher level of policing in the area and there was some success in reducing anti social behaviour along the footpath.

- 2.2 The disorder problems in this area are being monitored by the Joint Action Group (JAG), which is a multi-agency sub group of the Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) responsible for intelligence sharing and tactical analysis. Crime reports in this area over the recent 3 month period are as follows:
- In Waterloo Road 19 offences have been recorded. 8 of these relate to damage, but only 1 of these relates to graffiti.
 - In Hazon Way 3 offences have been recorded, 1 of these relates to graffiti.
 - In Temple Road 12 offences have been recorded. 6 of these relate to damage and only 1 relates to graffiti.
 - In Eastway, 1 offence of damage was recorded but this does not relate to graffiti.
 - In Court Recreation Ground there were 3 offences recorded. 2 of them related to damage but none related to graffiti.
- 2.3 Offences listed above other than damage and graffiti were varied, but reports of disorder were minimal.
- 2.4 Crime and disorder activity in this area is also monitored on a regular basis by the Town Centre Community Action Group. A major concern of this group, and indeed the CDRP, relates to disorder associated with people using town centre pubs and clubs and, in particular, dispersal from the town centre after closing time. A number of initiatives are being supported, including the late night bus, to try to address some of these problems.

3. Lighting

- 3.1 The footpath has been inspected by the Local Transportation Service and to provide a lighting scheme to current standards, the footpath requires an additional 10 lamp columns at an estimated cost of £10,000. There are no additional funds available within the Local Transport Service for new lamp columns. However, SCC has made a successful PFI bid that includes funding for lighting improvements across the county to improve community safety. The JAG will be identifying priority areas in the borough for such improvements and consideration will be given to including the footpath on this list.
- 3.2 It should be noted, however, that although better lighting is generally seen to improve community safety, in this instance it may encourage greater use of the footpath at night-times, which could have a negative impact on the specific concerns of the petitioners. Before any changes to lighting could be considered, it will be necessary to consult widely, particularly with local residents.
- 3.3 Lighting levels may also be relevant to any future considerations on the use of CCTV in the area (see below).

4. CCTV

- 4.1 Although, the Borough Council has no plans at present to extend the CCTV coverage of the Town centre, the CDRP is keen to review the effectiveness of the existing system. Options to introduce wider CCTV coverage, to include a possible mobile facility, as well as improving the capacity for direct communications between police and the CCTV monitoring centre, are some of the key issues for consideration. However, the ability to move forward on these issues will be dependent upon identifying the necessary resources and as there are currently no additional funds identified, it is impossible to put a timescale on future improvements. Accordingly, at the present time, CCTV is not available as an option to address the problems associated with this footpath.

5. Graffiti

- 5.1 Graffiti has long been a problem along the length of this footpath. As well as damaging residents' property and appearing unsightly and offensive, it contributes to feelings of insecurity and makes footpath users feel less safe. A major exercise to clean up the graffiti along the length of the path was due to commence on the weekend of 15 January. Householders have been leafleted for dispensation to carry out the work, but where this is not forthcoming after 30 days (for any reason) the work may be undertaken without permission. Young offenders, under supervision by the Youth Offending Team, will be carrying out this work, which should contribute to a dramatic improvement to the appearance of the area.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 Problems associated with this well used footpath are well known to agencies in the borough who are working together to improve community safety and reduce disorder. Relevant groups continue to monitor the situation with regard to the footpath, but reported disorder in this area is currently low.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: Local Committee report, Item 8 of 25 October 2004
