

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL



LOCAL COMMITTEE (EPSOM & EWELL)

DATE: 10th DECEMBER 2018
 SUBJECT: ST JOSEPH'S SCHOOL – TWO PETITIONS
 DIVISION: TOWN AND DOWNS

PETITION DETAILS:

Two opposing petitions have been received. The first reads as follows:

“Petition to consider modifying the current waiting restrictions on St Margaret Drive and St Elizabeth Drive during school and Kindergarten hours. We would like parents to be able to park between the hours of 8.30am and 9.15am, 11.40am and 12.30pm and between 2.30pm and 4.30pm.

Since 2001, St Joseph's School, Epsom has been accessed via both Rosebank and St Margaret Drive. Following a lengthy dispute with the Abelea Green Management Committee, St Joseph's has lost pedestrian & vehicular access to the school via St Margaret Drive. AGMC have a lawful right to prevent access and it is this right which they are exercising.

St Joseph's has 420 pupils from a wide catchment area. It is at the top of Rosebank, a winding cul-de-sac off West Street, with sections where only one-way traffic is possible due to parked cars.

About 50% of the pupils used to access the school via St Margaret Drive, particularly those living in Langley Vale, Ashted and Epsom Downs. They now need to approach the school via Rosebank or Whitehorse Drive. Both are highly congested roads, frequently gridlocked, and serve four educational institutions: Rosebery Secondary School, St Joseph's, Shapes Nursery and The Kindergarten Nursery.

The school has grave concerns regarding safe access to school. By modifying the restrictions, parents would then have an option to 'park and stride' to school, either via Mounthill Gardens or Whitehorse Drive.”

This first petition from the Governors of St Joseph's School has been signed by over 820 signatories, including:

- 550 signatures on a paper petition (it has not been possible to analyse these signatures)
- 175 online signatures from residents of Epsom & Ewell
- 52 online signatures from residents elsewhere in Surrey
- 40 online signatures from residents elsewhere in the UK
- 4 online signatures from residents of unknown address

ITEM 4

The second reads as follows:

“Given the above, we, the undersigned, call upon the Council to reject the petition put forward by the Governors of St Joseph’s School are to maintain the current parking restrictions on St Margaret Drive, St Elizabeth Drive and the estate generally.”

This second petition has been signed by 84 signatories, representing residents of St Margaret Drive, St Elizabeth Drive, St Theresa Close and St Edith Close.

RESPONSE:

Surrey County Council has for some years been aware of a dispute between the Roman Catholic Diocese of Arundel and Brighton on one side and the Abelea Green Management Company on the other. This dispute concerns access to St Joseph’s School via the car park of St Joseph’s Church, which is accessible via a private road connecting to St Margaret Drive. The Roman Catholic Diocese of Arundel and Brighton represents the interests of St Joseph’s school, and the Abelea Green Management Company represents the interests of the residents of St Margaret Drive (and adjoining roads) who are the owners of Abelea Green, and crucially the private road that runs across Abelea Green connecting St Margaret Drive to the car park of St Joseph’s Church.

Surrey County Council had no role to play in this dispute, as the dispute was between two third party organisations and concerned a right of access over privately owned land. Surrey County Council maintained a neutral position throughout the dispute, despite both parties attempting to enlist Surrey County Council’s support for their point of view. Surrey County Council was kept informed by interested parties as to progress with the dispute, but for a number of years the status quo prevailed despite the dispute continuing in the background. There had been a number of previous threats that the access route between the church and the school would be closed, but none of these previous threats resulted in any change to the status quo.

Now that the access route between St Margaret Drive and St Joseph’s School has been closed, Surrey County Council is monitoring the new situation. Generally speaking, it takes approximately 3 months after a significant change for new travel patterns to settle down, and for the new normal to be established. Until we know how the new travel patterns will settle down, it is impossible to recommend with any certainty what measures might help mitigate any impact. Surrey County Council has limited funding for implementing any mitigating measures, and it would be imprudent to invest this funding until we have good evidence to inform what measures might be helpful. Without good evidence, we might invest in some measure that does not help. There is a risk we might invest in some measure that makes any impact worse.

The soonest that this evidence could be presented would be March 2019, at which time Committee would need to weigh up the relative priority of investing in measures to assist with this situation, compared to the priority of investing in measures elsewhere in the Borough to alleviate other problems.

We are aware that St Joseph’s school has created a new pedestrian access route to Whitehorse Drive. This was the school’s initiative, and was fully funded by the school. We understand from the school that this new access route has been successful from the school’s point of view. We are not aware of any significant negative impact that this new pedestrian access route has had on Whitehorse Drive.

Officers have met the head teachers of St Joseph's and Rosebery schools to understand their concerns, and to discuss possible measures that Surrey County Council could implement. From a practical and technical point of view, the most that Surrey County Council is likely to be able to achieve is to tweak the existing infrastructure to respond to specific safety concerns. For example:

- We are aware that the vehicle detection at the traffic lights at the foot of Rosebank has not been reliable, resulting in the Rosebank arm of the junction missing its turn in the traffic light sequence. Impatient drivers have been violating the red light. Our Traffic Signals Team is already working to resolve this.
- We may be able to install bollards to prevent drivers mounting the footway in Whitehorse Drive.
- We may be able to modify the parking provision in Rosebank and / or Whitehorse Drive to assist with traffic flow, subject to consultation with the residents.

The change that would make the biggest difference would be for more families to choose not to drive their children to school. Neither Surrey County Council nor the schools can force families to choose to travel in a particular way; some families would say that they have no choice. Nevertheless it may be possible to encourage families to "park and stride" the last mile to school. There are a number of on and off street parking opportunities within a mile of St Joseph's and Rosebery Schools that might facilitate this, and officers will work with the head teachers of both schools to identify these possibilities. The suggested relaxation of the parking restrictions in St Margaret's Drive and St Elizabeth Drive may facilitate park and stride, but as Committee will understand any change in parking provision must be subjected to public consultation in the context of the relevant legal processes. It is clear that the majority of residents of St Margaret Drive and St Elizabeth Drive would object to any suggestion for school families to park in these roads.

Surrey County Council would always advise that driving children to school should always be the last resort. The benefits of using a sustainable means of transport for the school run include reduced congestion and pollution, improved fitness, health and concentration for those walking or cycling (or scooting), and of course reduced impact on the communities living near schools. If children were not driven to schools, many of the problems experienced at peak times during term time could be resolved.

RECOMMENDATION

The Local Committee is asked to:

- (i) *Consider the requested change to parking provision in St Margaret Drive and St Elizabeth Drive in the context of the next parking review, by which time the new travel patterns to St Joseph's School are expected to have settled down, noting that although there is strong support for the requested change within the school community, there is strong opposition to the requested change among residents of St Margaret Drive and St Elizabeth Drive.*

Contact Officer: Nick Healey, Area Highway Manager

This page is intentionally left blank