

£70 parking fine if you exceed 2 hours, even at weekends!

If the application for this supermarket is approved, all the parking spaces in the Close, including the 69 free long term ones, will be subject to a 2 hour parking limit, 7 days a week, enforced by the supermarket operator. According to the minutes of a meeting between MKC, Barton Wilmore, and WSP (their traffic consultants), obtained under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, the fine for overstaying this limit could be £70. Stony residents and staff of businesses who use the 69 free long term parking spaces will be told they can park in Ostlers Lane, across the other side of the town – despite the opposition of the Ancell Trust who owns this car park!



The FOI response suggests that a very inconvenient truth about the impact of this proposed big supermarket development on traffic and parking in Stony is being played down. Some of the proposals, such as taking public parking in Cofferridge Close into private ownership, and introducing a partial one-way system in Silver Street, seem very doubtful.

What the developers want

At the moment, there are 69 long-stay, unlimited, free parking spaces along the public highway in Cofferridge Close, and 58 free short stay (2 hour limited on weekdays) parking spaces close to the existing small Budgens supermarket (>> <http://www.stonystratford.co.uk/Documents/stonystratfordcarparks.pdf>)

Barton Wilmore, agents for the owners of the site, in their planning application, propose taking over all the public parking in the Close, including the public highway, and handing control over to the 'end user' supermarket operator with whom they are currently negotiating. This potential operator also now demands that parking be limited to 2 hours (to maximise the 'throughput' and turnover of shoppers to the supermarket), including on Saturdays and Sundays, whereas the original application proposed a 3 hour limit, to allow time for people to visit other shops and facilities (pubs, restaurants etc) in the High Street.

Barton Wilmore are keen that the 'end user' supermarket operator should have full control over the parking arrangements, including adoption of the public highway, as "... *it allows the store to have some discretion in enforcing fines and experience shows that this makes stores with such arrangements more successful*"¹.

Current penalty charges imposed by MKC are either £70 (reduced to £35 for early payment) or £50 (reduced to £25). MKC insist that any charges within Cofferridge Close – whether managed by MKC or the end user (under a Parking Management Agreement proposed by the developers), would need to tie in with these.

It is proposed that the people who currently use the 69 long stay free spaces in the Close should use the Ostlers Lane car park, a good ½ mile walk away at the other end of town. This car park has room for 73 cars, and is already heavily used by regular visitors to the adjacent Sports Ground. Barton Wilmore have proposed covering the costs of 'improving' this car park (re-surfacing etc).

What MKC wants

MKC have made it clear that they require the car parking spaces in Cofferridge Close to remain as public highway "...for the very fact that they are the only spaces that are part of the public highway... all others being the subject of lease agreements. That fact, placed alongside the recent knowledge that there are real threats to the existence of these leased spaces in Stony due to proposed development, places even more importance on keeping Cofferridge Close within the public highway. (There is) a real concern for the provision of public parking in the town and (we) do not wish to jeopardise it to any greater extent"². Retention of the parking spaces as public highway also allows MKC as Highway Authority to control them in terms of their operation, and to maintain some uniformity across Stony Stratford.

MKC officers have also made it clear that proposed changes to the planning application which affect 'stopping up' public highway land, and parking and traffic issues, must be subject to a process of public consultation³. *So make your views felt about this, to* : Debbie.kirk@milton-keynes.gov.uk

1 From notes of a meeting between MKC and Barton Wilmore, March 14th, 2012

2 Email from Andy Swanell, MKC, to Clive Patmore, WSP, May 16, 2012

3 Email from Andy Swanell, MKC, to Clive Patmore, WSP, Nov 18, 2011

What the local community wants

The **Ancell Trust**, who own the Ostlers Lane car park, have made it perfectly clear since last autumn that the trustees “ *have concerns that if the Car Park at Ostlers Lane is used as a Long Term Car Park then this would reduce the car parking spaces for the sporting activities at the Sports Ground and there would appear to be no benefit to the Charity if agreement was given to the improvements.*”⁴

Last November, the notes of a meeting held between MKC, **Stony Stratford Business Association**, and **Stony Stratford Futures Group** specifically mention: “ *Dissatisfaction that employees would no longer be able to park in Cofferridge Close car park, (and) .. discomfort with the use of Ostlers Lane car park for long stay purposes....(and).. that any improvements to Ostlers Lane car park were not of benefit to the town but a means for the developer to change the Cofferridge Close parking to accommodate the proposed food store... (and) .. that Ostlers Lane car park could not offer any additional long stay capacity due to its use by the sports clubs ... and that its surface shouldn't be disturbed ... (it) takes the loads that are applied to it and there have been no complaints from Ancell Trust regarding the condition of the car park.*”⁵

The Minister of the **Stony Stratford Community Church** has written to MKC on behalf of his 170+ congregation to express strong concern, not only over the scale of the proposed development, but also the possibility that “ *the current car parking facilities would be taken over by the developer and therefore no longer be classed as Public Highway. This could impose parking charges and greater limitations on time*”⁶. He is concerned that this would affect many of their local community activities (elderly folks teas, mums-n-tots group, weekly drop-in lunch club, the Sunday service programme, and their annual Winter Warmers programme for the homeless...). The Minister ends his letter by petitioning the Local Authority to refuse planning permission for the proposed supermarket and associated works.

Proposed Silver Street partial one-way system

It is clear from the email exchanges we have seen that WSP (Barton Wilmore's traffic consultants) have been pushing MKC to introduce a partial one-way system between Horsefair Green and Cofferridge Close entrance, before consideration of the planning application, to make it easier and speedier for future customers of the proposed supermarket to get in and out of the Close⁷. At a meeting of **Stony Stratford Town Council (SSTC)** on May 15th, when a representative from MKC came to propose an 'experimental' trial of this one-way system, the proposal was unanimously rejected by SSTC, and that it should only be considered, if at all, after the Planning Application has been determined. In any case, the rationale for making part of Silver St one-way is far from clear, and the unintended outcomes (a further increase in traffic through Horsefair Green, the Market Square, and Church Street, the transformation of Oxford St and Ousebank Way into a 'rat run'?) could make the already bad traffic situation even worse. The transformation of the High Street into a one-way route has already had alarming affects on increased traffic flow through Horsefair Green, Silver Street, Market Square, and Church Street.

Our Conclusions

The emails and meeting notes we have seen via the FOI request are troubling. The impression they give is that Barton Wilmore, acting for CBRE, assume that, regardless of the views of the local community and of SSTC, the planning application will be approved. The tone of some of the emails to overworked and understaffed MKC officers is rather aggressive and pushy, and, overall, one gets the impression that a very inconvenient truth about the impact of this proposed big supermarket development on traffic and parking in Stony is being concealed. Some of the proposals, such as taking public parking in Cofferridge Close into private ownership, and introducing a partial one-way system in Silver Street, seem very doubtful.

And it is also eminently clear that the owners of the site and their agent, Barton Wilmore, have paid no attention whatsoever to the fact that Stony Stratford Town Council have unanimously voted (in March last year) to oppose the scale of the current application, and that over 400 letters objecting to the application have been posted on the MKC Public Access website. All the recent discussions with MKC have been over matters of detail (parking, lorry turning circles...), with scant recognition of the local community's clear wish for an alternative, smaller scale, scheme ('Plan B') to retain existing structures and landscaping and the original mixed use vision of the site (offices, shops, small supermarket, residential, dental practice etc).

4 Letter from the secretary of the Ancell Trust to Andy Swanell, MKC,

5 Email from Andy Swanell to Clive Patmore, WSP, Nov 17, 2011

6 Letter from Rev. Dilnot to Debbie Kirk, MKC, June 14th 2012

7 Email from Clive Patmore, WSP, to Andy Swanell, MKC, Nov 7, 2011