

# High Woods Lane, Hawkenbury – Parking Issues

For Joint Transportation Board on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2021

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## Summary

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**Classification:** Public document

**Wards Affected:** Park

## Recommendation

That the Board endorses the advertising of a traffic regulation order for additional waiting restrictions as detailed in this report.

## 1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 In 2018, permit parking was introduced in Hawkenbury. This followed an extensive consultation process, during which this Board was updated through reports at key stages. Further consultation on a possible extension to the zone (HA) took place late in 2019 with amendments coming into effect in July 2020.
- 1.2 During the course of developing Zone HA, one issue arose on several occasions, that being parking in High Woods Lane. The lane, which begins at a junction with Halls Hole Road, is bordered on one side by residential properties and on the other largely by Hawkenbury allotments. The level of parking along the lane has increased in recent years and some local residents have requested a greater level of restriction.
- 1.3 This report provides details of the development of permit parking in Hawkenbury, the issues which have existed in High Woods Lane and proposes actions in response to comments from local residents.

## 2. Permit Parking in Hawkenbury

- 2.1 Although several streets in Hawkenbury had experienced high levels of on-street parking demand for several decades, it was only when the former Land Registry building was occupied by AXA PPP that complaints began to be made about parking problems and the idea of introducing permit parking arose.
- 2.2 The matter was first reported to this Board in February 2016. At that time, the results of an informal consultation with residents were detailed. Three residents of High Woods Lane responded to the consultation with 2 stating that there were, at that time, no parking issues in the lane and one saying yes there were. All three, however, indicated that they did not favour permit parking.
- 2.3 A January 2017 Board report detailed responses to a further consultation in which a specific proposal for permit parking and yellow line waiting restrictions was detailed. Whilst nothing was initially proposed for High Woods Lane or the roads leading off it – Cleeve Avenue and Chester Avenue - comments received as part of the consultation responses led to a change in the proposals which included a single yellow line on both sides of High Woods Lane and Chester Avenue, with no waiting allowed between the hours of 10am to midday and 2pm to 4pm.
- 2.4 Members endorsed the proposals as outlined at the January 2017 Board meeting and these were subsequently advertised in a public consultation exercise during June of that year. That resulted, amongst other things, in objections to a restriction on the north-east side of High Woods Lane because of its negative impact on allotment holders. The overall proposal was amended to exclude the yellow line from the allotments side of High Woods Lane but left the remainder as advertised. Because of the overall number of changes proposed, an amended traffic regulation order was advertised in September 2017 and the results reported to the October meeting of this Board. No comments were received in respect of High Woods Lane.
- 2.5 Permit parking areas and associated yellow line restrictions were duly introduced and became effective on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2018. The intention was that the scheme would be reviewed after being given time to settle and this was duly done during the summer and autumn of 2019, with details being reported to the October 2019 meeting of this Board.
- 2.6 It will be noted that, in the appendices to that report, several comments were made in respect of High Woods Lane. These are repeated in Appendix A to this report. It is important to stress, however, that any restrictions on parking would not apply to the lay-by opposite the houses.
- 2.7 A report to this Board in February 2020 detailed the statutory consultation which subsequently took place and proposed amendments to the Zone HA restrictions, including the introduction of permit parking to previously unrestricted streets. No proposals were made in respect of High Woods Lane because, at that time, the land ownership issue was still being investigated.

### 3. High Woods Lane

- 3.1 High Woods Lane is a single carriageway road on the outskirts of Hawkenbury leading from Halls Hole Road into farmland to the south-west of Tunbridge Wells. Approximately the first 220m of the lane is publicly maintainable highway after which it becomes a private road leading to the bowling club and agricultural land.
- 3.2 Within the publicly maintainable section of the lane, only the carriageway and footway on the south-western side are highway. The verge on the north-eastern side is not maintainable at public expense. This means that any restrictions imposed on the lane would not apply to that verge which, in places, is wide enough to accommodate vehicles completely clear of the carriageway.
- 3.3 The allotment land to the north-east of High Woods Lane is owned by the Borough Council and leased to the Hawkenbury Allotment Holders Association. That ownership only extends to the hedge bordering the allotments and, therefore, excludes the verge between the hedge and carriageway. This means that neither the highway authority nor Borough Council exercise any control over the verge.
- 3.4 The consequence of this is that vehicles parked wholly off the carriageway cannot be managed by the Borough Council. Nor do any waiting restrictions imposed on the highway apply to it. In other parts of the lane, where the verge is narrower, a vehicle would have to park at least partly on the carriageway meaning that any waiting restrictions would apply to those vehicles.
- 3.5 Since the introduction of permit parking residents of High Woods Lane have, from time to time, complained about parking by AXA staff in the lane. It has been explained that, although we could seek to impose restrictions on parking, that would not stop it from happening where vehicles could be parked wholly off the highway, that land being mainly opposite the few residential dwellings which front onto the lane.
- 3.6 AXA were contacted in response to suggestions that staff were continuing to park in High Woods Lane during lockdown but were adamant that no staff would be doing so since there were much reduced numbers of staff at the Forest Road site and the on-site car park was available for their use.
- 3.7 A further consideration is that any restrictions would also affect allotment holders since a yellow line waiting restriction applies to all vehicles. The other associated aspect is that the Borough Council does not have, and never has had, a policy of preventing long stay on-street parking wherever it occurs. Controls are only introduced where it is appropriate to do so within the terms of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.
- 3.8 Simply preferring parking by one long-stay non-resident rather than another is not a legitimate reason for imposing restrictions. Preserving or improving amenities; preventing danger or damage; removing unsuitable vehicles and/or managing air quality are appropriate reasons but none of these could, for instance, legitimately differentiate between a local worker and an allotment holder.
- 3.9 Notwithstanding the comments made in the preceding paragraphs, there is acknowledged to have been a growing issue in High Woods Lane, with parking along

one side often forming an almost unbroken line of vehicles, mostly parked at least partly on the verge which, in turn, causes damage and restricts the remaining width of carriageway for moving traffic.

- 3.10 The 2020 pandemic resulted in different working arrangements and parking behaviour has changed as a consequence, in some instances quite significantly, so it has not been an ideal year for undertaking parking surveys. Work has, however, been done to try and ascertain the scale of any problem.
- 3.11 Because comments had been made about parking in High Woods Lane over a period of time following the 2018 introduction of permit parking in Hawkenbury, a survey was undertaken in the first half of 2019 and further information about parking numbers was gathered during October and November 2020. The 2020 survey was, therefore, conducted both immediately before and during the second national lockdown.
- 3.12 As might be expected, parking numbers dropped significantly during 2020. Between January and June 2019, the average number of vehicles parked in High Woods Lane was 20.67 but in the two months of recorded data for 2020, the average was 13.3. The numbers ranged between 13 and 27 in 2019 and 6 and 17 during 2020.
- 3.13 It seems clear from these figures that Covid-19 and lockdown had a significant impact on the level of parking in the lane. What is also apparent is that the volume of parking before and during the second period of lockdown was unchanged – the average before is 13.33 and during is 13.28 vehicles.
- 3.14 It was further noted during site visits that some at least of the vehicles parking in the lane belonged to allotment holders which was also to be expected. A check of registration numbers taken during the 2019 and 2020 surveys showed very few repeats. Of the vehicles that were parked in High Woods Lane in the 2019 survey, only 4 appeared during 2020. With a total of 124 different vehicle registration numbers recorded over the two survey periods, that is a very low (3.2%) number of repeats.
- 3.15 Although different interpretations could be placed on the lack of repeat registrations between 2019 and 2020, one might be that local workers who may have been parking in the lane in 2019 were not present in 2020. That would certainly accord with AXA's statement that no staff would be parking there. A visual check of their car park on several occasions showed it to be operating at substantially less than capacity on each visit.

## **4. Possible Courses of Action and Recommendation**

- 4.1 Bearing in mind the foregoing comments, there are a limited range of possible options for the lane. Do nothing remains a viable option since there is little harm being caused by the present parking situation, other than an unsightly verge and possibly some delays to through traffic. Those issues do, however, fall in line with reasons why a restriction can be imposed and it is, therefore, considered legitimate to at least consider their introduction

- 4.2 Since there is already a single yellow line on one side of the street, it would be possible to introduce the same on the allotment side, as had originally been intended. That would, however, almost certainly result in the same objections – to the effect that allotment holders would be adversely impacted. It is not, therefore, considered to be a good option.
- 4.3 Another possibility would be to introduce a single yellow line that, instead of preventing parking for four hours of each weekday, restricted it for a much shorter period, say one hour per day Monday to Friday. If timed correctly, this could prevent commuters or office/retail workers from parking in the lane whilst having less impact on residents or allotment holders. This restriction could be imposed along the whole of the north-east side or at selected points where the carriageway is narrowest to allow two vehicles to pass.
- 4.4 Introducing permit parking could be an option but there has been little unqualified demand for it from nearby residents so that is not something that would be advocated in the foreseeable future.
- 4.5 It is important to stress that, whichever option is chosen, there would remain no control over parking on the wider areas of verge. It is understood that residents frequently use that space despite all properties in High Woods Lane having their own off-street parking facilities.
- 4.6 Taking all the above points into consideration, the two most viable options at present are a) Do Nothing and, b) Introduce a single yellow line on at least part of the north-eastern side of High Woods Lane.
- 4.7 Since it is anticipated that parking demand may return to something resembling pre-Covid levels over the next year or so, and if it is accepted that parking was problematical before March 2020, action now should prevent any recurrence of previous concerns.
- 4.8 To avoid inconveniencing allotment holders as much as possible, the Hawkenbury Allotment Holders Association have been contacted and they have indicated that a weekday 11am to Midday restriction would work best for their members.
- 4.9 Any consideration of additional restrictions in High Woods Lane should also include mention of Cleeve Avenue, where there are currently no restrictions on parking. Although little interest has been shown for permit parking in that street, the informal consultation in 2019 resulted in concerns being expressed by two respondents about non-resident parking.
- 4.10 On balance, it is considered most appropriate to promote a restriction on waiting between 11am and midday, Monday to Friday which extends along the whole length of the north-east side of High Woods Lane plus on both sides of Cleeve Avenue.
- 4.11 Since no informal consultation has taken place in respect of this and because residents of only two streets would be directly affected, and due to the unusual current circumstances, it is proposed to write to each resident of High Woods Lane and Cleeve Avenue explaining what is being proposed. Depending on the response, a traffic regulation order will be advertised. If any objections are received as a

consequence of the latter process, the matter will be referred back to this Board with a further recommendation.

- 4.12 It must be understood, however, that the above proposal would still not impact on parking in the unofficial off-highway lay-by near the Halls Hole Road junction and anybody would still be able to park there without risk of receiving a Penalty Charge Notice.

## 5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Subject to this Board's endorsement of the above, residents of the affected areas – High Woods Lane and Cleeve Avenue - will be written to indicating the suggested restriction. Depending on the response, a traffic regulation order will be advertised and any objections considered, with the results being reported to the April meeting of the Board. If there are no objections, and subject to KCC endorsing the proposal, the traffic regulation order will be made without further reference to Members.

## 6. Appendices and Background Documents

Appendices:

- Appendix A: Comments received in respect of High Woods Lane in 2019
- Appendix B: Existing Waiting Restrictions

Background Papers:

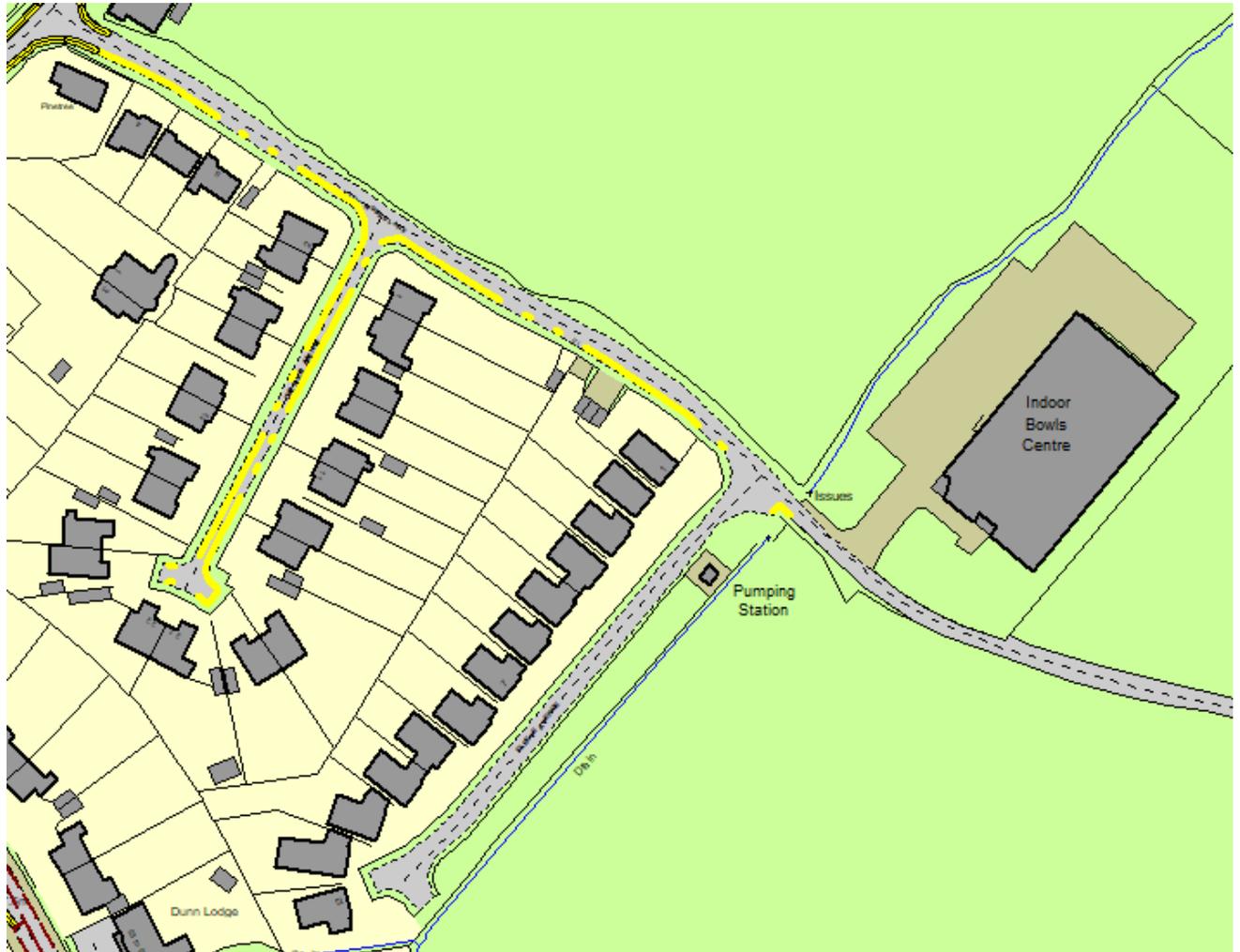
- February 2016 JTB - <https://democracy.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=186&MId=3473&Ver=4>
- January 2017 JTB - <https://democracy.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=186&MId=3641&Ver=4>
- July 2017 JTB - <https://democracy.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=186&MId=3934&Ver=4>
- October 2017 JTB - <https://democracy.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=186&MId=3935&Ver=4>
- October 2019 JTB - <https://democracy.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=186&MId=4436&Ver=4>

- February 2020 JTB - <https://democracy.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=186&MId=4437&Ver=4>

## Comments Received in respect of High Woods Lane in 2019

Road	Comment
High Woods Lane	<p>In the last couple of years and following the introduction of the restrictions throughout the village, parking end to end in High Woods Lane opposite the houses has become intolerable. Residents, their visitors and users of the Haha community facility are denied access during weekdays. The predominant 'culprits' are from AXA, which has never made proper parking provisions on site for their employees, who number around 1000! Other agencies in the area, which have expanded their premises at the expense of their previous on-site parking areas, commuters to TW and London have added to the problems. The constant flow of heavy vehicles to/from the farms and businesses in the High Woods Lane is making the narrow lane unsafe for pedestrians and residential car users, when there are so many cars etc parked on the verges. Therefore, we would support additional restrictions opposite the houses <u>providing</u> neither the residents or the many Haha plot holders are penalised in any way. A possible solution would be a single yellow line with timed restrictions and permits issued to plot holders, printed by Haha, at no cost, which are recognised as valid by TWBC. NB. Haha plot holders already contribute to the cost of the lease agreement with TWBC through their subscriptions/rents.</p>
	<p>The parking issues we experience are that (mostly) Axa workers park in the bays at the top of High Woods Lane opposite our house. This land has historically been used by the Haha allotment holders, especially older and disabled members as this is the entrance to the specially designed plots there. Axa staff (and others) regularly block these bays out for the duration of the day, preventing use by allotment holders and residents alike who also use the bays there when appropriate. We only need to use the bays for visitors or when work vehicles need to park on our drive. The lane had a small grass verge along its entire length but that has been eroded as more cars from outside the area have had to seek alternative parking since the introduction of parking measures elsewhere and this has worsened in the last year making the road narrow for the farm vehicles and coaches that regularly visit the area. The only reservation we have is that Residents Only Parking will penalise both residents and allotment holders in order to prevent Axa staff being inconsiderate. It would make sense to avoid ambiguity and formalise the parking for residents with a parking pass with allotment and local occasional users having access to the scratch card passes for temporary use as and when. It has also been suggested that Haha operate a pass of their own as many residents are plot holders too but unfortunately, TWBC has not supported this in the past.</p>
	<p>IF A YELLOW LINE IS CONSIDERED THE ONLY WAY TO SOLVE THE PARKING PROBLEM, BELIEVE D TO BE CAUSED BY AXA PERSONNEL , WOULD YOU THEN CONSIDER ALLOWING THE HAWKENBURY ALLOTMENT ASSC. TO ISSUE FREE PERMITS TO PLOT HOLDERS ONLY. THIS WOULD ALLOW YHEM TO ACCESS THEIR PLOT AT ANY TIME. THE PARKING RESTRICTIONS NEED ONLY TO APPLY DURING THE WEEK AND NOT WEEKENDS.</p>

## Existing Waiting Restrictions



The current restrictions in High Woods Lane and Chester Avenue, as denoted by the broken yellow lines, are No Waiting 10am – Midday and 2pm – 4pm, Monday to Friday