

Report to: Charity Committee

Date of Meeting: 25 June 2018

Report Title: Rock a Nore Car Park -Feasibility Study and Car Park Stacker Budget

Report By: Mike Hepworth
Assistant Director Environment & Place

Purpose of Report

To request approval to go ahead with an application to the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) for a feasibility study into the congestion issues at Rock a Nore Car Park requiring a funding contribution, and to increase the current budget provided by the Foreshore Trust for the Seasonal Car Park Stackers.

Recommendation(s)

- 1. That the Foreshore Trust annual budget for the seasonal car park stackers is increased by £2,000 per annum (from £10,000 per annum to £12,000) with effect from 2019/20.**
- 2. That a total budget of up to £30,000 is approved for the feasibility study described in the report, and that the Foreshore Trust will fund 25% of the costs of the study up to a maximum of £7,500.**

Reasons for Recommendations

The seasonal car park stackers perform an important role, it makes sense that for only a modest increase in budget, the role is also available for what is often one of the busiest bank holiday weekends of the year.

Although the seasonal stackers aren't a total answer to the congestion issues, they make an essential contribution. If they are not present, the council is often subject to serious criticism in the local media.

Regarding the feasibility study there are lots of theories as to what causes the congestion at these peak times. These range from the car park lay out, the sequencing of the traffic lights at the end of the road, the effect of the pedestrian crossings at this junction and the number of traffic signals all along the A259. What is not in doubt is the serious impact for the visitors trying to park or drive away from the car park, which in turn has an impact on the local economy.

This is an opportunity to fund an expert analysis of the problem, which will identify potential solutions to the very serious problems affecting this part of the Old Town on busy Summer weekends.

Background

Issues at Rock a Nore Car Park

1. Hastings has the largest beach launched fleet in Europe. The Stade area where the fishing beach is located is already a popular tourist and visitor destination. It is the place where the historic Old Town, with its wonderful mixture of historic architecture, distinctive black wooden net-shops, fishing beach with its boats and gear, museums, aquarium, amusement arcades and fun-fair all come together. All against the backdrop of the East Hill cliffs of the Country Park and the ruins of Hastings Castle on the West Hill. It is a favourite with all tourists to the town, photographers, artists and film-makers.
2. The fishing beach and associated supply chain businesses are reached by a narrow highway (Rock A Nore Road) which ends in a loosely gravelled and in some parts tarmacked car park where tourists and the fishing industry park.



- 3.
4. The car park has a capacity of approximately 450 spaces and the income generated is in the region of £650,000 per annum. As most of the car park is of a gravel type surface, it is not possible to mark out the bays.
5. During the summer and 'shoulder seasons', there are significant issues with congestion on Rock a Nore Road. The large car park is located next to the fishing quarter and the beach. Access to the car park is off the main A259, through the narrow Rock-a-Nore Road, with vehicles having to enter the car park to turn around and come back onto the A259.
6. There are anecdotal stories of cars being stationary in both directions on the road for over 3 hours waiting at the traffic lights or waiting for spaces to become vacant. Council officers and councillors have witnessed these problems first hand on numerous occasions.
7. Last year after the Easter Bank Holiday the Hastings Observer ran a story about a petition being launched in protest at road chaos in Rock a Nore Road:
<http://www.hastingsobserver.co.uk/news/petition-launched-in-protest-at-road-chaos-in-hastings-rock-a-nore-1-7936502>
8. Again, these issues reoccurred around the Easter Weekend and the Hastings Observer had a headline which read '100s stuck in Hastings Car Park':

<https://www.hastingsobserver.co.uk/news/transport/hundreds-stuck-in-hastings-car-park-for-more-than-two-hours-1-8441325>

9. It needs to be noted that on both occasions the weather was extremely good and the whole town was particularly busy, car park full signage was placed out on the roads near the junction, the electronic signage on the ring road diversion areas was being used and council staff were in the car park.
10. The issues tend to become worse when many of the motorists attempt to leave at the same time with the traffic backing up from the lights at the junction to Rock a Nore Road and then all around the car park. This in turns blocks cars trying to leave and cars trying to park in the car park at the same time.
11. It can be said that the issues primarily relate to moving traffic on the highway, which is the responsibility of East Sussex County Council in their capacity of Highways Authority. There are views that the traffic lights and the pedestrian crossings at the junction make the situation worse. However, it could also be argued that if there was not a car park at the end of the road much of the traffic would not try to drive down there.

Role of the Car Park Stacker

12. For many years the Foreshore Trust has provided a budget of £10,000 per annum so that two part time seasonal Car Park Stackers can be employed to work in Rock a Nore Car Park over the busiest summer months of the year.
13. These staff are part time, working 24 hours a week and always work on both Saturday and Sunday. Their main responsibilities are to stack motor vehicles in an effective manner to ensure effective use of the car parks, to enable a smooth operation for drivers and passengers arriving and departing.
14. Without bay markings motorists will take up more parking space than needed, reducing parking spaces exacerbating congestion issues, and impacting on 'pay and display' income. Well trained Car Park Stackers carrying out their role have the following benefits to the car park:
 - Efficient parking will operate and allow greater opportunity for more visitors to park.
 - Parking Income should increase.
 - The sight of an employee managing parking may deter some motorists from choosing to ignore payment.
 - Accessible and well managed parking will encourage visitors to return, which in turn supports the local business economy.
15. It needs to be noted that neither the Car Park Stacker or any other Council Officer working within the car parks has the legal authority to stop moving traffic or direct moving traffic on a highway such as Rock a Nore Road. So, they are only able to operate within the car park itself and not on the highway.
16. Due to the budget the Car Park Stackers are not currently employed in readiness for the Easter Holiday. As a result the Council's Wardens have needed to be drafted in to assist in managing the car park. This presents serious difficulties for

the Warden service as it is a small team providing a 7 day a week service. It is responsible for a wide range of enforcement, not just in the car parks. For example, dealing with serious anti-social behavior issues in the town centers associated with street drinkers. Allocating Wardens to assist in Rock a Nore car park over the weekend means they aren't available for other important duties either during the weekend or through the week.

17. This year the car park stacker role was budgeted to begin on the 30 April 2018 and end on the 16 September 2018 which coincides with the sea food and wine festival. This 21 weeks of work will cost approximately £8400

18. Easter varies from year to year but the earliest date it can be is 22 March. This would equate to a further 7 weeks for the Car Park Stackers to work which would cost a total of £11,500 for 28 weeks.

If the budget was increased from £10,000 to £12,000 this would then allow the car park stackers to begin in time for the Easter Holiday every year. As mentioned above, the dates vary so there would be savings against this budget in some years.

Feasibility Study

19. There is an opportunity to make an application for EMFF funding which would fund a study into the issues around Rock a Nore Car Park and provide possible solutions.

20. A feasibility study would include

- An assessment of the current situation regarding the car park – including management, surfacing, vehicle movement, access and usage
- An assessment of the current VMS signage provision and proposal to improve this provision, including designs, capital and installation costs and annual maintenance costs
- Options for the redesigning of the car park, considering layout, resurfacing, entrances and exit
- These options would also need to consider disability access to the parking machines.
- Costed capital costs to undertake the work in the options suggested and ongoing annual maintenance costs associated with each option.
- The scope to consider installing an Electric Charge Unit.
- An analysis on the increase to car park revenue and the impact on the traffic congestion in the local area.
- Careful consideration of the safety measures that would be required for pedestrian users to the car park
- Suggested timescales for any suggestions
- SWOT analysis of the options suggested.

21. We have been advised that such a study would cost in the region of £20,000. If successful with an EMFF grant application match funding for £5,000 would need to be approved as well as an initial outlay of £20 000 (with the EMFF refunding £15,000). As of yet we have no quotes for the study, £20 000 is an estimate but it may be more.

22. If this study gains approval and financial backing, we would need to demonstrate to the FLAG board that we would give serious consideration to the recommendations. However, this does not mean that the Foreshore Trust would have to commit to hundreds of thousands of pounds to redesign and resurface the car park. But we could for example use the study to work with partners such as ESCC to see how the solutions could be funded and how they might fit into the wider transport strategy for the town.
23. Last Summer officers including myself met with the Team Manager for Strategic Economic Infrastructure from ESCC. Below for information are his observations shared internally following that visit:

Rock a Nore Car Park

- There are two car parks – one which is surfaced and operates as a one-way system off the far end of Rock-a-Nore Road, which leads into the other main car park which is part surfaced/part unsurfaced (nearest the sea); this car park can also be accessed separately via a two-way access.
- The surfaced area of the main car park has spaces marked out whereas the unsurfaced section hasn't, and cars can go two ways down the aisles – barriers are used to provide a route through for traffic on the unsurfaced section. Cars are known to park in these aisles which means cars can't get around and out of the car park easily and get into situations when having to reverse, or cars have a 'stand-off' as they come in opposite directions, will not move as they don't have the space to get past, and this creates congestion throughout the car park.
- The cost of surfacing the unsurfaced section which is around £600k and there was concern that it wouldn't last as it would be right on edge of the beach.
- When the car parks are at capacity HBC employ staff at the A259 junction, at the entrance into the car park and in the car park to try and manage the parking. However, drivers will ignore the advice and try and use the car park anyhow.
- Something that could be done with the car park entrance/exit arrangements, perhaps create a one-way system in and out but also look at the car park layout to again create a one-way system, rather than the existing two-way aisles, to reduce the potential conflicts and improve the overall circulation.

Rock a Nore Junction

- VMS car park signs could be provided on the entrance to Rock a Nore Road (to replace the current manual one) which can be seen from both directions (linked into the suggestions below for the current traffic information signs).

A259

- On the A259 near the Pier and up near Ore (apparently), there are traffic information/VMS signs. I saw the one by the Pier which was advising that there was parking at Priory Street available for £1 all day.

Therefore, the surfacing, marking of bays and directional arrows (one way rather than the current two way) in the Rock-a-Nore car park would be an appropriate way to address some of the current circulation issues that occur in the car park. The VMS signage at the entrance to Rock-a-Nore Road would also be supported but will need to be seen from both directions because, as we observed, traffic from the north is unable to see the current manually operated sign.

In addition, consideration should be given to linking the Rock-a-Nore sign(s) to the two other VMS signs on the A259 near the Pier and on London Road so that these signs are used more effectively to manage traffic aiming for the seafront car parks, by intercepting that decision making and encouraging such traffic to use the town centre car parks instead, especially if Rock-a-Nore is full or nearly full. This may therefore require additional VMS signage near Albert Place and at Breeds Place - linked to the two existing and the one at the entrance to Rock-a-Nore Road - to reinforce the messages to drivers and direct them to the town centre car parks.

24. Regarding a proposed feasibility study and the possible solutions, he has commented that

This project complements the wider vision for improving local economic growth and the role of transport within the town, which is focussed on improving movement and access, by reducing traffic congestion, creating safer access, delivering high quality infrastructure and information, and embracing the growing opportunities to maximise the use of technology and communication to enable 'smart mobility'."

Policy Implications

25. There are several policy implications as described below.

Risk Management

26. The serious congestion issues repeatedly experienced in this popular area of the town have significant implications. There is the scope for disputes between motorists frustrated at the inconvenience of being trapped in long queues in and out of the area. There are reputational consequences for the council and ESCC. There are potential safety hazards due to the way the car park is operated.

Economic/Financial Implications

27. There are financial implications as the funding for the proposals are not currently identified in the budget. Plus, the findings of a specialist survey could have consequences for future budgets. However, an expert analysis of the issues and options to address them could enable access to external funding and partnership working with agencies such as ESCC.

Local People's Views

28. There is clearly a widespread view that the Council and ESCC need to do something about this recurring serious seasonal problem. The matter was also reported to the Coastal User Group on 19th June 2018, and their views will be verbally updated to Charity Committee at the meeting.

Timetable of Next Steps

29. Please include a list of key actions and the scheduled dates for these:

Action	Key milestone	Due date (provisional)	Responsible
Approval Granted	Report to Charity Committee on 25 th June 2018	25 June 2018	Foreshore Committee
Complete specification for the tender and test the market		by July 2018	Paul Cosson Rosie Leech
	Submit Application to EMFF and approval gained	By September 2018	Paul Cosson Rosie Leech
Project Commences		TBA	

Wards Affected

Old Town, but the impact of the traffic congestion also affects neighbouring Wards.

Implications

Relevant project tools applied? Yes

Please identify if this report contains any implications for the following:

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness	No
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)	No
Risk Management	Yes
Environmental Issues	No
Economic/Financial Implications	Yes
Human Rights Act	No
Organisational Consequences	No
Local People's Views	Yes
Anti-Poverty	No

Additional Information

Appendix 1 - Specification for a feasibility study for re-design of Rock-a- Nore car park
Appendix 2 – Location Map for Car Park
Appendix 3 – Location of Vehicle Messaging Signs

Officer to Contact

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