

As owners of Chilbolton Cow Common the Parish Council (CPC) is focused on balancing its responsibility and duty to protect this very special site (it is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest); with:

- enabling those who occupy the four dwellings on the Common to exercise their right of access to their homes;
- enabling vehicular access to the War Memorial Playing Field (WMPF);
- enabling vehicular access by the public to a small gravelled area for parking.

Over the last few years CPC has become aware of the growing popularity of the Common for families with young children, dog walkers, horse riders, cyclists, ramblers and so on. This increase in the number of visitors has brought with it, unfortunately, an increase in anti-social behaviour. This includes drinking alcohol in large groups; leaving litter; having BBQs; camping and overnight parking; evening parties with loud music; using the Common as a toilet; and aggressive behaviour to anyone who attempts to remonstrate. These behaviours can and do damage the SSSI.

There is not, and never has never been any, right of vehicular access by general public to the Common without the permission of CPC as owners. Immediately after the entrance to the Common, over a cattle grid, there is a small gravelled area which is part of the SSSI. The main purpose of this area is to permit access to the four dwellings and to the War Memorial Playing Field (WMPF). However, CPC have for years permitted the general public to park on this area provided the parked vehicles do not obstruct access to the various dwellings and the WMPF. It should be noted that Natural England are unhappy at CPC allowing any parking on an SSSI. The area where cars park is part of the SSSI. Unfortunately, this area is too small to enable all those who wish to park at peak times to do so. Peak times are usually school holidays and bank holidays when the weather is fine. The increase in numbers visiting the Common has increased the pressure on the area where parking is permitted. The result has been parking that more and more frequently obstructs vehicular access to the dwellings and the WMPF. The CPC has a duty, as the landowner, to take reasonable steps to prevent the right of vehicular access being obstructed. One way is to ban parking on the Common. CPC have fought long and hard against doing this. CPC are aware that those with compromised mobility would be particularly disadvantaged. The area is also popular with residents of Chilbolton who prefer to drive to the Common to exercise their dogs.

In an effort to avoid preventing parking on the Common, CPC have striven hard over the years to come up with a scheme that permits parking and permits access. Various different schemes have been tried and all failed to prevent access being obstructed by parked vehicles. Fairly recently, CPC made a number of changes, most notably encouraging people to park in a herring-bone pattern along just one side to enable access, not just for residents, but for the emergency services too. It should be noted that three of the four properties are thatched and are at greater risk of fire. Also, one resident is elderly and in poor health and may need an ambulance at any time. This arrangement allowed the same number of cars to park. However, the significant number of visitors who parked inconsiderately and thereby frequently obstructed access meant that CPC had to investigate other options.

Following a public consultation held on 17 August '22 ([minutes of the meeting](#)), it was agreed that the gravel area would be reduced in size and designed in a way that reduced the likelihood of inconsiderate parking obstructing access. Importantly, this included very clear notices indicating

areas where cars should not park because access was necessary. However, to the great disappointment of CPC, inconsiderate parking that obstructs access has continued unabated. The notices have been blatantly ignored. CPC has photos of vehicles parked alongside the “No Parking” notices. Too often, efforts to try and persuade drivers to move their vehicles are met with aggression and vulgar abuse. Reluctantly, CPC have concluded that a significant number of drivers are simply not willing forgo the convenience of parking on the Common even if it denies others their legitimate right of access and adversely affects the safety of their persons and property.

It should be noted that the number of drivers attempting to park on the Common often causes congestion in Joys Lane. This is a single track road with poor visibility and no adequate turning places. Cars trying to leave are met with cars trying to arrive and blockage and frayed tempers follow.

CPC have been driven to take the course of action that it has tried for years to avoid, namely to close the gate at the cattle grid at weekends from the beginning of June to end of August and everyday throughout the school summer holidays. The blame for this lies fairly and squarely on those drivers who have repeatedly shown a lack of consideration for others and feel no inclination to obey requests to park in a way that does not obstruct access.

It should be noted that free car parking is available at West Down within walking distance of the Common along footpaths with one well marked road crossing. The footpath from Coley Lane to the WMPF is cleared of vegetation by CPC when necessary. It is currently in good condition. CPC are aware that the location of this car park may not be suitable for those less able-bodied or families with young children who cannot walk far. With this in mind, CPC have agreed to supply blue badge holders with the codes to enable them to use the gravel area to park subject to certain conditions.

There are no parking restrictions on Village Street (provided the highway and entrances to properties are not obstructed), and there are three footpaths leading from the Village Street to the Common:

1. Grindstone Green Path - next to the telephone kiosk opposite the Abbots Mitre (approx. 80m short, flat walk). CPC removed two stiles from this path to enable better access.
2. Joys Lane Path – approx. 50m along the road from the Village Post Office and Stores heading towards Joys Lane (approx. 225m to the Common). There are no stiles.
3. Frogs Lane – approx. 140m on the right hand side from the Church heading into the village. There is very limited off-road parking available here and is approx. 315m to the Common. Again, there are no stiles.

The above footpaths are indicated by finger posts. CPC will, very soon, attach additional “fingers” saying “The Common”.

Also there is space for parking on Fullerton Road, Wherwell adjacent to the Long Bridge that gives access to the Common.

It should be noted that since the area where parking is allowed has been closed this summer, when the weather is good, the Common has continued to be well used mainly by families with young children who enjoy playing in the Purleygig Stream. Significantly, there have been no reports of the sort of anti-social behaviour mentioned above. On the contrary, the behaviour of visitors has been exemplary. This is good news as far as CPC’s duty to protect the SSSI is concerned. Natural England will be encouraged.