

Fleetville Community Centre New Building Project

NB37: The Project and Royal Road

The New Building Project is not limited to the site on which the current building stands. During the course of its construction space will need to be allocated for a contractors' area and for the movement of heavy vehicles. This will be a matter for discussion between Fleetville Community Centre and St Albans City & District Council. No further reference to this element will be made in this document.

The road and the frontagers

Royal Road is a short cul-de-sac with a "painted" roundabout intersection with Hatfield Road, which is sometimes congested at busy times as the opposite arm of the roundabout serves Morrison's supermarket.

The blind end of the road has no turning circle; when first laid it was intended to join Burnham Road, but the two land owners could not agree, and houses were later built across the gap.

There are two large frontagers at the north end of the road: Fleetville Infants' School and Fleetville Community Centre. At the southern end is a frontage to the play park, which is a part of the recreation ground, and a small number of residential properties, mostly built when the road was new c1902.

Current parking arrangements

There are five lengths of the road where public parking is not permitted (or not permitted at school times):

- a) outside Fleetville Community Centre because private parking for 14 vehicles is allowed for off-road on its front land;
- b) outside the double garage belonging to the owner of a Burnham Road house;
- c) in two locations outside the school, both of which are marked out with zig-zags.
- d) Two of the residential properties have their own private driveway parking, meaning that street parking is not possible opposite those driveways.
- e) opposite the entrance to the vehicular access to the recreation ground.

Residents currently park outside their homes on the east side of Royal Road, but these are not marked bays covered by a residents' parking scheme and there are occasions when other vehicles are parked in that section of the road. Between the two zig-zag zones non-controlled parking is available for

5 or 6 cars, normally occupied by employees of the school when that is open. Space for three cars is available on the west side, north of the private garages. The largest uninterrupted zone is adjacent to the play park, a parking zone first allocated here in the 1930s. It is used by a mixture of owners, from nearby traders, Royal Road householders and visitors to the play park and Beech Tree Cafe.

A raised crossing has been installed across the road at the children's entrance to the school; and a disabled parking space is outside the entrance ramp to the Community Centre.

School pick-ups

A major hazard is created by parents who drive their children to the school and then pick them up in the afternoons. Most of these cars require short-term parking space, often using the zig-zags or parking in any of the vacant private spaces of the Community Centre.

It is not possible to know, before entering the road, whether there are any available spaces, and manouvreing along the road is made more difficult by the tunnel effect of parking on both sides of the road.

Large vehicles

Regular visits to the school and community centre have to be made for rubbish collection, and separate rubbish collection to the householders. Minibuses bring and collect small groups of users to the community centre; and occasional visits are made by the Fire Service.

Solutions offered by the new building

We should not assume that solutions will be widespread, but there are possibilities of minor improvement.

It is possible, though decisions have not yet been made, that the new development will be able to accommodate a few additional off-road spaces in a second row under the building. We might consider this increase to be proportional to the increased footfall offered by the new accommodation. However, we already rely on users parking at Morrison's, on cycling, bus and walking, all of which are recommended modes of transport for community facilities explicitly set out in the new District Plan. No practical increase in the number of parking spaces will provide all the parking for our needs.

Large vehicle drive

It might be possible to incorporate into the development, and with the approval of the District Council, a wider and properly laid vehicular access to the recreation ground. This is owned by the Council. As it would be of benefit to the community centre for deliveries and mini-buses, it may be

possible to widen this onto community centre land to enable large vehicles to wait and turn.

Parking scheme

Although outside of the responsibility of the community centre it might be possible to safeguard street parking for residents through a residents' parking scheme.

School pick-ups

The Community Centre has, of course no responsibility for parents of school children driving their cars into Royal Road, and our advice to our users and delivery drivers is to avoid the road altogether on school days from 8.30 to 9.00am and 3.00 to 3.30pm.

The public parking zone

At the southern end of the road the west side parking zone was the first designated parking zone for Fleetville, first marked out in the 1930s, and has remained unchanged since then. In 1935 there was probably one residential occupant who owned a car (Dr Smythe at Fleet House); it is possible that no employee of the school drove a car to his or her place of work; the garages did not exist; no adult would have thought of driving to pick up their child from the local school and park up for a coffee at the Beech Tree (which was not there then either) and supervise their offspring's play at the play park. There was no nursery or community centre either. This was a cul-de-sac ideally suited for parking; but even then the number of vehicles was limited to that part outside the present play park – about eight in number.

If any attempt is going to be made to de-clutter the road space it seems reasonable to look again at this parking zone – after 80 years! And for these reasons:

- a) Every vehicle entering Royal Road, for whatever reason, also has to exit the same way. There are therefore frequent vehicle conflicts in “the tunnel” at the southern end, formed by the public parking zone on one side and the residential parking zone on the other.
- b) Vehicles entering the road, especially larger cars and vans, often have to wait to give way to a leaving vehicle already in “the tunnel”. This often entails having part of the vehicle still across the junction in Hatfield Road. Pedestrians are then also affected in their attempt to cross the mouth of Royal Road.
- c) Even without considering the additional vehicles moving within the road at school arrival and departure times, the road and footpaths are busy with children and their parents. As it is an infants school the size of the children makes them virtually invisible behind stationary vehicles and

moving vehicles alike. The arrival and departure of parents' cars makes the presence of small children in the street space even more risky.

- d) Although a problem for a comparatively short period of time each day, these movements are uncontrolled by recognised codes of driving conduct (the rules of the road) or by signals. The uncertainty the circumstances generate is often a cause of frustration for drivers and arguments are not unknown.
- e) When the streetscape is viewed from the main approach, Hatfield Road, we see two levels of the scene ahead: above normal head height is a largely green air zone, mainly to the left, and the attractive brick structures of the school and houses on the right. However, the ground level zone is an unappealing mess of parked vehicles with no coherence to what is viewed. It is not clear to pedestrians how their approach to the northern part of the road should be undertaken. From the point of view of personal safety, we usually feel more secure if we have a reasonable amount of uninhibited space around us. With a cluttered Royal Road this is not often provided.

So, What could be done about it?

Clearly, Fleetville Community Centre has no responsibility for what lies beyond its premises, but since we are planning for a replacement structure in Royal Road, and part of our remit is to design a building which is both attractive and sits well within its immediate environs and the streetscape, we consider we do have a responsibility to recommend improvements to the environs and streetscape by the decisions we make, or suggest to others.

Further, visitors will not engage with the new building only when they reach it. Hopefully they will be able to begin engaging with it as they approach it, especially as they walk along the footpath.

Currently, the western footpath is quite narrow, only just wide enough for two people to walk side by side. However, on the road side is a wall of cars – and in two places there are safety fence panels. On the play park side is a low wall, which is probably low enough to be a trip hazard given that it is not always easy to spot, especially with overhanging tree branches reducing ambient light.

The trees are a valuable part of the streetscape and have been planted at random distances from the footpath; the grass bank into which they grow is a pleasant sward, but only to look at, for its gradient is unsuited for walking on, especially as the low wall persuades pedestrians to keep to the footpath.

If the public parking zone was removed – also removing the “tunnel” hazard – that would also eliminate the actual and psychological wall effect on the right side of the footpath.

We would also recommend removing the low wall on the play park side of the footpath and lowering the grass bank, possibly with the exception of the immediate vicinity of the trees, where brick retaining walls could be built. Where there are no trees the footpath might be widened by a further six feet – rather less where there are trees.

Near to Hatfield Road the wall is rather taller as the road gradient falls away; the wall could be rebuilt further back at this point, and the footpath would then be wider by about two feet.

Unfortunately, there is a BT pole carrying overhead wires to most of the properties in the road, but that is the only restriction. The sloping paths leading from the footpath to the Beech Tree and the play park could be redesigned to offer a similar gradient though rather less directly.

A path of varying width would therefore enable a more attractive and welcoming walking route to the centre, as well as to the school.