

Replacement car park fence at St Dunstan's Church, Hunsdon

Design and Access Statement

Background and History

St Dunstan's Church, Hunsdon is located on Church Lane (unclassified) approximately 1.5km south of the village centre. It lies within a Rural Area Beyond The Green Belt designated by the East Herts District Plan 2018. The current building is of C12th origin and is Grade I listed. It is surrounded by a burial ground which was deemed full during the early C20th, in consequence of which land on the opposite (west) side of Church Lane was secured to establish a new burial ground.

The post-war years saw an expansion of the village and an increasing availability and use of cars to visit the church and / or to attend the burial grounds. In the absence of any provision for car parking, presumably visitors would park along Church Lane; this must have presented a safety issue because the church is on a bend in the road with the church wall immediately adjacent to the highway. Moreover with the establishment of Harlow New Town in the 1950's, the upgrading of its railway station and subsequently the opening of the M11, there was an ever increasing use of Church Lane by traffic from The Hadhams, Puckeridge and Braughing heading towards Harlow. The concerns over parking became so acute that, in the 1980's, a parcel of farmland on the west side of Church Lane stretching from opposite the church to the new burial ground was given over to the church for use as a car park. This was dedicated as the 'Rosalind Gibbs Memorial Car Park 1988' and ownership registered with The St. Albans Diocesan Board of Finance. It is approximately 150m long (along the length of Church Lane) by 10m deep (measured from the roadway) but widens at the southern end, adjacent to the new burial ground, to allow for turning. The existing field fence would have been removed and reinstated further back and loose aggregate laid to provide some hardstanding.

The parking arrangement was always 'informal' (ie unmarked) other than that recovered railway sleepers were laid on the ground parallel with and set back from the roadway by ~1.3m. Over years, however, these decayed and crumbled and were replaced in early 2000's by a series of 0.95m wooden posts on 2.4m pitch linked by chain, on the same line as the sleepers. This fence itself is now in urgent need of replacement for a number of reasons:

- a. Most of the posts have rotted at the base and become weakened – many have already fallen for one reason or another
- b. The height of the fence and chain catenary are such that they cannot be seen in the rear view mirror of most cars, and so there have been instances of visiting drivers reversing into the fence and damaging it
- c. The entrance gap into the car park was, inadvertently, left sufficiently wide for very large vehicles to access it. Frequently drivers of HGVs, including 'artics', will pull off the A414 to find the first available location where they can take a statutory rest period. They will often then find a gap in the broken fence to exit the car park and avoid turning around; evidently once a small gap has been created then its continue use by HGVs will make the gap wider. By exiting through these gaps, HGVs are damaging the roadside verge (which – until this practice started – was planted with spring daffodils) and, potentially, the roadside curb. Moreover it may be considered that HGVs re-entering the highway to go in either direction presents a safety hazard to traffic, especially to that coming from the north around the bend. Taken together, we believe that use of the car park by HGVs should be actively discouraged, but are mindful that extreme measures such as barriers or height restrictions would be inappropriate in this rural setting.

Associated Planning History

3/85/1790/FP Extension To Existing Car Park at Hunsdon Church and Proposed Car Park at Hunsdon Churchyard – Withdrawn by Applicant

3/86/0721/FP Link Road Car Park Between Existing Church Car Park and Graveyard – Granted with Conditions

Proposal

The proposal is to replace the current dilapidated fence with a post and twin rail fence (see attached photo example). This is proposed for the following reasons:



- This type of fence is widely used in rural situations and is considered entirely in keeping with the intended location and complementary to other fencing in the area.
- The major height of the fence (ie the top level of the rails) is proposed to be at a height above ground of 1.2m in order to be visible in a rear view reversing mirror. It would therefore fall outside of Permitted Development allowed by TCPO 1995 Class A which specifies ***the height of any gate, fence, wall or means of enclosure erected or constructed adjacent to a highway used by vehicular traffic would, after the carrying out of the development, exceed one metre above ground level.*** In the absence of a definition of ***adjacent to a highway***, however, our understanding is that the generally accepted rule for Permitted Development is that:
 - Fence within 1 metre of the Highway / Path next to highway should be under 1 metre tall.
 - Fence more than 1 metre away from the Highway / Path next to highway can be up to 2 metres tall.
- It is proposed that the entrance gap into the car park should be narrowed to deter unauthorised use by HGVs. This would be achieved by reinstating part of the fence at the northern end and leaving a gap of 7m to the start of the major part of the fence. The fence would thus comprise (starting from the northern end, opposite the church):
 - 16m fence, to connect with the existing field boundary fence
 - 7m gap
 - 125m fence, to connect with the existing burial ground fence.

Both sections of fence would be set back from the highway by 1.3m, although this would increase somewhat at the northernmost point to connect with the existing fence.

The proposed location of the gap is determined by several factors:

- There is an existing dropped curb which defines the southern-most access to the car park
- The location is chosen to be as far from the bend as possible, within the constraints of the dropped curb access, to allow for cars slowing to turn into the car park or for cars exiting and turning onto the south-bound carriageway. Cars approaching from the both directions will have slowed to negotiate the bend, and the natural inclination for south-bound traffic is to accelerate away from the bend. The entrance would thus be at the point where speed of traffic in both direction is at its minimum.

- The shape of the car park is such that cars must enter at one end and turn at the other, and the only turning point available is at the southern end. Consequently the entrance should be at the most northerly safe point.
- The provision of a small section of the car park to the north of the proposed entrance will provide for an area reserved for use by the rector and church officers.