



## St Margaret's at Cliffe Parish Council

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To: Cllr Charlotte Zosseder  
Cc: Cllr Kevin Mills; Cllr Jamie Pout

Dear Cllr Zosseder

I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to you in your capacity as Portfolio Holder for Community and Corporate Property, on behalf of St Margaret's Parish Council regarding the proposed changes for parking in St. Margaret's at Cliffe and St. Margaret's Bay.

While recognising the importance of periodically assessing economic needs in the Dover District, we would like to emphasise the significance of considering localised economic impacts on villages such as ours and urge a re-evaluation before implementing any alterations.

In alignment with the Secretary of State's guidance on the Civil Enforcement of Parking Contraventions (Statutory 249 Agenda Item No 8), it's crucial to ensure proportionality and vitality in towns and villages. Charging for parking at **Reach Road Car Park** might risk disproportionate impact, and we strongly oppose this move for the following reasons:

The choice of rural car parks, specifically in St. Margaret's Village, warrants special attention due to its distinctive layout. Unlike other areas under review, the village lacks viable alternative parking options in nearby streets. The narrow roads further compound the issue, making it challenging for individuals to park their vehicles without causing additional obstructions. Please note our high street is not wide enough to allow for a pavement and the main road which feeds the St Margaret's Bay area is not wide enough to allow for a central white line.

The existing car park serves as essential parking for numerous village establishments, including the Village Shop, Post Office, Public House, Estate Agent, Hair Salon, Bowls Club, and Accountancy Firm. Moreover, it accommodates overflow parking for the Cricket Club and Village Hall when necessary. During the tourist-heavy summer season, it caters to visitors who then explore nearby attractions or patronize other

establishments in the Dover District. The absence of this free parking would significantly impact these enterprises.

The car park sees its peak usage during church services and school drop-off and pickup times. However, outside of these periods, the car park experiences relatively low utilization. Finding a parking spot is rarely an issue, making the implementation of a charging mechanism for improving car turnover unnecessary.

The Reach Road car park includes a maintained toilet facility, an expense covered by the St. Margaret's Parish Council precept, amounting to £9,309 for the upcoming year. Should charges be imposed at this site, the maintenance costs would need to return to DDC. This change would likely have a considerable impact on the economic considerations related to including this car park in the charging plans.

The local Primary School accommodates 210 pupils, approximately half of whom reside outside St. Margaret's. Due to limited bus services, sadly now typical of rural areas, a significant number of these pupils, potentially over 100, are transported to school by car. This influx of vehicles results in morning and afternoon parking congestion along Sea Street and Reach Road, even with the current free car parking. Sensible parents rely on the nearby car park for safety. However, if charged, this would amount to c£2 per day, totaling £380 per family annually. The headteacher has expressed concerns that such charges might prompt parents to consider relocating their children to other schools, a change that, even with a slight drop in enrolment, could severely impact the budget of a school this size. The introduction of charges at Reach Road car park could potentially escalate parking on village roads during school hours, worsening existing traffic issues.

As a Parish Council we are deeply concerned for our school and nursery staff who utilise the car park and may struggle with a £10.80 daily parking fee, particularly when many of them, despite their qualifications, earn not much above minimum wage. The same financial strain applies to workers in our estate agency, village shop, hairdressing salon, and post office. These hardworking individuals are the lifeblood of our village, playing a pivotal role in keeping our community thriving.

The adoption of a cashless payment system, while economically practical from a DDC perspective, raises concerns regarding potential age and economic biases. The majority of our elderly population, who do not own smartphones, may face challenges accessing the car park. Simultaneously, this approach might inadvertently exclude individuals with limited economic means from utilizing this facility effectively.

Also of note is the Reach Road car park's CCTV system, provided, maintained, and monitored by the Parish Council. This was initially installed to address anti-social behaviour and vandalism, previously a concern voiced by the community. The surveillance network is integrated with the Village Hall and forms part of a broader system overseen by the Parish Council. Should DDC assume control and introduce charges for this car park, the Parish Council are likely to consider charging DDC for utilizing the CCTV coverage at a commercial rate, estimated between £60 and £120 per week.

We acknowledge the significance of accessible and well-managed parking in alleviating and avoiding traffic congestion. While we understand the necessity for parking spaces to be rotated instead of remaining occupied throughout the day, this hasn't been a prevalent issue in St. Margaret's so far. Our current car park functions efficiently, facilitating residents' access

to local businesses and schools, while also accommodating necessary parking for key workers over more extended periods as required during the day.

As far as we can tell, the following free car parks will remain in the DDC district if the current proposals are accepted by the cabinet to go forward to public consultation – 14 in Dover Town, 4 in Deal and Aylesham will also maintain its free rural car park.

It's essential to highlight that the previous proposal to introduce parking charges at Reach Road Car Park was met with substantial opposition from our residents. Should the decision be made to include this car park in your proposals, I want to emphasize there will be considerable objections during the public consultation phase. Our village is deeply committed to safeguarding this crucial asset for our community.

Additionally, we take note of the proposal not only to raise the hourly parking rate by 20p but also to transition from seasonal paid parking to year-round charges for the **St. Margaret's Bay Car Park**.

The introduction of charges aimed at encouraging parking turnover has notably benefited this small car park in a bustling tourist spot, especially during the extended tourism period from March to October. In very recent years extended from May to September, this change occurred without active objection or encouragement to object from the Parish Council. Generally, the Parish Council endorses this parking management strategy, actively supporting paid parking during these extended months and issuing permits for residents at a seasonal cost of £55. This approach has been supported to improve parking dynamics and accommodate both visitors and residents effectively.

The implementation of charges to encourage parking turnover has been beneficial, particularly in this small car park located in a bustling tourist spot, especially during the peak tourism months from March to October. Please note this was very recently extended from May to September and, at that time, the Parish Council did not actively object or encourage others to do so. In general, the Parish Council has shown support for this approach to parking management and has actively supported both the concept of paid parking during these months and the provision of permits for residents at a cost of £55 for the season, including the recent extension of the paid parking from May to September to the current March to October.

During periods outside of the tourist season, the car park isn't inundated and provides a serene spot for parking, especially on inclement weather days, offering a chance to admire nature. The beach café manages a steady trade, allowing it to remain operational year-round.

For residents, who rely on the car park regularly, as accessing this area by foot poses safety concerns due to the lack of footpaths along the narrow and hazardous road leading to the bay, currently benefit from free parking out of season, the proposed increase in annual parking charges at this car park from £55 in 2023 to £100 in 2024 will be prohibitive for most. While this escalation is unlikely to significantly bolster DDC revenues, considering the challenges associated with implementing a cashless payment system due to poor mobile reception in this area, the proposed change carries substantial social implications. Those who frequent the beach promenade, one of the few accessible walking areas around the Bay, will be significantly affected by this alteration.

We, as the St. Margaret's Parish Council, earnestly implore the Cabinet to give serious and thorough consideration to the outlined concerns and to the impacts associated with the proposed implementation and changes to parking charges, especially concerning the Reach Road Car Park.

Upholding the principles of proportionality and vitality within our local economy, while adhering to the Secretary of State's guidelines, remains crucial. Moreover, the proposed alterations to the St. Margaret's Bay Car Park necessitate careful reflection, considering the unique dynamics of seasonal demand and the community's access during different periods. We trust your consideration will prioritise the welfare of our residents and the sustainability of our community's essential assets. We appreciate the chance to showcase our village and illustrate that parking turnover isn't a prevalent issue here. The cost to the community of implementing charges far exceeds any financial benefits anticipated. In this regard we are open to discussing alternative options to forge a mutually beneficial way forward.

Thank you for your attention to these pressing matters.

***J Cook***

Jane Cook, Parish Clerk  
For and on behalf of St Margaret's at Cliffe Parish Council