

Report 2012-16 Highway issues in Main Street near the church

1. The narrowest part of Main Street, Carlton is the section fronting Saint Andrews Church and house numbers 24-28. There is a pinch point between The Cottage (No.35) and The Stone House (No.24) where the distance between the front garden wall of Nos. 33-35 and the house wall of No. 24 is 7.59m. At this point the width of the carriageway (distance between kerb faces) is 5.24m.
2. The cultivated land between the front house wall of 24-26 Main Street and the kerbs is part of the highway.
3. Cars are regularly parked along the northern side of Main Street between numbers 20 and 39. Two dwellings (numbers 33 and 35) have no garage or dedicated parking space. When cars are parked outside these dwellings, the available width of the carriageway is reduced to about 3.3m.
4. In 2011 a combine harvester ran over the grass in front of The Stone House in order to get past cars parked on the northern side of Main Street. This heavy vehicle crushed a water stop tap cover and left ruts in the grass. The driver of this vehicle did not stop or notify the householder of the damage caused. The stop tap chamber had not been constructed to highway standards.
5. Following a complaint from the occupier, the Highway Authority erected three wooden bollards in front of The Stone House in 2011 to prevent any further damage or encroachment. The bollards are 0.15m square and are set back 0.39m from the kerb. They appear to have been installed the wrong way round, with red reflectors to the right of oncoming traffic. The gap between the face of a bollard and a parked car would normally be 3.6-3.7m.
6. In June and July 2012 a combine harvester was unable to drive through Main Street because there was not room to pass between parked cars and the new wooden bollards. Complaints about obstruction of the highway were made to a Parish Councillor and to the Clerk.
7. The Police were asked for advice, and replied that the parking of cars in front of 33-35 Main Street did not constitute obstruction of the highway.
8. The Highway Authority has advised that it works to a running carriageway width of an absolute minimum of 2.5m, and preferably 3.0m to allow the passage of cars, while 3.25m is considered the ideal width for accommodating lorries and buses. The actual measurements depend on the class of road and the expected usage. A load more than 3.0 m wide is classified as an abnormal load.
9. The occupiers of 24-26 Main St have stated that they would not wish the existing grass to be replaced with a surfaced footway. The Highway Authority has stated that it would not consider hardening the grass (for example with subsurface grids) because doing so would encourage vehicles to mount the kerb which is very close to the dwellings.

10. The Highway Authority has stated that it does not provide off street parking facilities, and would not consider the construction of a car parking bay in the wide highway verge in front of Field Farm.

11. In July 2012 a local landowner advised the Clerk that his combine harvester would require access, and the Clerk was able to ask the owners of parked cars to move them to allow this vehicle to pass.

12. The Clerk spoke with other landowners, who confirmed that both they and agricultural contractors experienced problems in this part of Main Street with seed drills and large trailers as well as combine harvesters.

13. During the peak harvesting season in July, the Clerk put two large cones in Main Street with notices asking residents to keep the road clear because combine harvesters required access. The cones were moved off the road, one notice was removed, and when replaced one cone was removed entirely.

14. There is a long history of complaints about both speeding traffic and obstruction of the highway by parked cars in this part of Main Street. In the 2011 Parish Plan, speeding and parking in the road were identified as the two most important causes of problems in the parish. In the case of speeding, 64% of respondents identified it as a problem against 21% who thought it was not. In the case of parking in the road, 43% of respondents said it was a problem, against 33% who thought it was not. These were the only two causes of problems identified by a clear majority of respondents.

15. The Parish Council has taken the view that vehicles parked in the carriageway are generally beneficial because they force drivers to slow down. Covert speed surveys near the church have shown that most drivers at this point are obeying the speed limit.

16. The Highway Authority is generally reluctant to introduce parking restrictions such as double yellow lines in rural hamlets.

17. Parking restrictions are difficult to enforce, and in this location would disadvantage residents who have nowhere else to park, would increase the density of parking in adjacent areas of Main St, and might lead to increased speeding round the corner near the church because of an expectation that the road ahead would be clear.

18. The Police and the Highway Authority have suggested that as the parked vehicles belong to local residents the most appropriate solution is for residents to be made aware of the situation, and for farmers to ask them to move their vehicles when the need arises.

Recommendation: that this report be copied to the occupiers of 31-37 and 24-28 Main Street with an appropriate covering letter, and that an article about the problem be submitted to Carlton News.

C J Peat
4th September 2012