

Proposal to Create a Safe Space Advisory Team

The Safe Space initiative was started in 2018 at the suggestion of the Walberswick Common Lands Charity (WCLC) and Walberswick Parish Council (WPC). The purpose was to look at ways to make Walberswick a safer space given the need to share its increasingly busy roadway among motorists, pedestrians and cyclists while at the same time respecting the unique and special character of the Village. The initiative was launched at the 2018 Annual Parish Meeting.

The seven person Safe Space team brought together volunteer representatives from the largest Village organisations including WCLC, the Village Hall Committee, WPC, as well as volunteers who had past experience in developing the Parish Plan, managing traffic and parking within the Village and in their professional capacities. Members of the Team are listed at the bottom of page 2.

The team commenced work by gathering as much data as possible via: traffic speed and volume indicators and surveys, a Village-wide questionnaire (with 144 responses), meetings with residents in areas identified as having special concerns (The Green and the Church), plus Village businesses. It soon became clear to the Team that it required professional support to evaluate the issues and come up with possible solutions. This resulted in the engagement of Urban Movement, an highly experienced traffic and public space consultancy, who worked with the Team to analyse the issues and come up with a specific set of proposals. This was made possible by the generous support of WCLC in funding the work of the consultants.

Working with Urban Movement was a revelation to the Team. The Team's original belief was that solutions would need to involve yellow lines, signage and heavy enforcement. The Team was aware that such an approach would be controversial, expensive, and in terms of enforcement, extraordinarily difficult. What we learned from Urban Movement was that influencing the psychology of road users through improvements in the road scape, road finishes, and clever use of 'visual clues' were the most successful ways of managing speed, parking and road sharing problems. There is ample evidence across the country on how such approaches succeed.

Working intensively with the Team, and drawing from the issues highlighted in the various consultations, a report with proposals for dealing comprehensively with the four "hotspots" in the Village¹ was developed. It is presented in the form of drawings from Urban Movement to the Team with each section identifying the problems, the objectives, and how physical solutions would work.

From the start of the Team's work, it was understood that once proposals were developed, it would be necessary for the Parish Council, as the statutory body, to take the proposals forward. Initially, the Team thought that prior to returning to the Council, the Team could organise sessions during the Spring/Summer of 2020 to share and explain the proposals to interested villagers. However, Covid-19 severely impacted the Team's ability to meet and move the proposals forward. Therefore, on the basis of work completed, the Team now believes it is the appropriate time to fold its work under the Council. In particular, the Team has completed the following:

¹ These are (i) the entrance to the Village at Adams Lane, (ii) the area in front of the Church, (iii) the 'tunnel' and Stock's Lane Triangle, (iv) the area where the Village Hall, shops on the Green, Jubilee Seat meet. In a second phase, there could be work done on the area in front of the Co-op shop although there are complications associated with land ownership in that area. Each of these 'hotspots' of parking, speed, sharing of roadway have specific issues and also spill over into adjacent areas.

1. As described above, the Team collected traffic and speed data to get a good baseline on vehicles coming in and out of the Village.
2. Initial consultations and surveys were held to understand the main issues and opinions.
3. Intensive work was undertaken with consultants to identify the key spots in the Village that needed to be addressed from a safe shared space perspective.
4. Proposals were finalised on how to address these issues.
5. A first meeting was held in early November between the Parish Council member of the Safe Spaces Team (Cllr Bassinette) and a representative for Suffolk County Highways Department, together with two concerned villagers who live near the Church, to discuss the means of addressing the problems with speeding, parking and road rage that were experienced in that part of the road during this extremely busy summer. At that meeting, the Highways Specialist explained the process for engaging with Suffolk County Highways on changing lines and the roadway including getting widespread support through consultations, engaging with the Suffolk County and District Council representatives for Walberswick, and raising the necessary (and significant) funding required. The Specialist also expressed admiration and support for the proposals drawn up by the Team as an excellent way to take forward the engagement with Suffolk Highways.

The Team would now like to recommend that it become an Advisory Group to the Parish Council. Its proposed terms of reference would be as follows:

1. To advise the Parish Council on issues of Safe Spaces and in particular to develop a set of proposals for possible implementation in the Village. (completed)
2. With the agreement of the Parish Council, to engage with Suffolk Highways and our County and District Representatives to gain the necessary support/sign off/input on these proposals (following on initial contact already made with Suffolk Highways noted above).
3. To provide technical support to the Parish Council during the Council's future consultations with the Village on the Safe Spaces Proposals.
4. To act as a support group to the Parish Council in delivering on the proposals once they are approved and prioritized by the Council.
5. The Council may wish to include the Safe Spaces proposals as part of the Neighbourhood Plan in order to give implementation additional authority.

The members of the Safe Space team are as follows:

Josie Bassinette, Robin Buncombe, James Darkins, Alvin Hunt,
John Nichols, Hannah Sutton, Bill Willison