



MELTON PARISH COUNCIL

MPC(23)84.01

Melton Road Bench

Background

A resident asked if a bench could be placed somewhere on Melton Road to give those walking between Woodbridge and Melton on the eastern side somewhere to take a break, especially if you are elderly, have young children or have mobility issues. There is currently no seating between the corner of Dock Lane and the Thoroughfare. The resident offered to pay for the bench and a memorial plaque.

As the Council owns no land on this side of Melton Road/Hill a local landowner offered to site it on their land near the entrance to Smithfields. They also offered to construct the plinth and install a memorial plaque. As the owners will continue to maintain the land the Council had to submit a planning application, otherwise it would have fallen under permitted development.

A planning application was submitted and discussed at the Full Council meeting on the 10th May, where the Council discussed the objections that had been raised. These objections related to fears about antisocial behaviour from teenagers and littering. The Council felt that the risk of ASB was low and resolved to recommend approval with the following submission:

The Parish Council supports this application for a bench to be located at the entrance of Smithfield. The bench was requested by residents who walk between Melton and Woodbridge. There is no seating for the length of Melton Road from Dock Lane until you reach the Thoroughfare/Elmhurst Park. If you are elderly, have mobility issues or young children it is a long way to walk without anywhere to take a rest.

The Parish Council applied for planning permission because the owner of the land stated that they wished to continue maintaining the land. Had the council taken over the maintenance of the land then no planning application would have been required as it would fall under permitted development.

Goldstar Melton Ltd, who are the owners of the piece of land, confirmed they have maintained the grass area since the 1980s when it was established and would not expect or allow the owners of the properties to maintain it.

With regards to antisocial behaviour the Council does not feel this will attract the sort of ASB that the residents have concerns about. There are other benches located near shops, for example opposite McColls on The Street, and we have not been made aware of littering and antisocial behaviour there. It is felt unlikely that people would chose to gather on a small bench in full view of passing vehicles and pedestrians to indulge in illegal and offensive activity when they could chose a more secluded location. Should the Council be made aware of ASB occurring in this vicinity then they would consider moving the bench. Residents are reminded to report any incidents of ASB to the police using their 101 service (online or by phone).

Planning permission was granted on the 14th June at which point one of the original objectors (a relative of a resident) contacted the Parish Council:

"I strongly feel that our valid reasons for concern have been underplayed, and I'm very keen to open a dialogue with the parish council (and indeed the property owner, who is not resident) to try and find a solution. To re-iterate our concerns:

My mother is a pensioner who has mobility issues and multiple health concerns, including very high blood pressure. One of the reasons she recently moved to Melton, the area of her childhood, was to escape intimidation from youths continually loitering at her last property boundary (where there was a bench) making noise late into the evening and dropping litter which she had to dispose of. This proposed new bench, which would be just outside of her garden hedge, would only be 5 metres from her front door and bedroom window above, making noise pollution an issue. Unlike parks which tend to have a closing time, this annexing of space right next to someone's front gate would mean public access 24 hours a day. As an older person who lives alone, my mother would also feel very intimidated having to walk past people sitting on the bench to reach her gate (only a metre away) and I have no doubt that this would lead to her feeling unsafe and to greater levels of anxiety / distress, which quite frankly her health cannot take.

I also deeply disagree that the bench and concrete "would not harm the visual amenity of the area". As a trained artist, currently anchoring the Royal Academy summer show as an invited artist, who has 25 years of professional experience and has shown at major galleries all over the world – I feel differently. It is not an aesthetically pleasing object and concrete is decidedly less pleasing than grass.

I understand the original reasoning from the proposer of the bench, but feel there has not been sufficient consideration of other potential sites along the road that would in many ways be much more suitable. It is an idea supposed to bring the community together, not cause conflict. None of the immediately adjacent residents wishes it to go ahead. Could we try and come together to find another site for the installation? For example, I have previously suggested just across the road, at the corner with Jenner's Close, which is further away from people's front doors and already has a bin.

We urge the parish council not to go ahead immediately - in the interests of community cohesion, can we please open a dialogue about this issue?"

To clarify the bench would not be sited directly in front of the resident's property but closer to the entrance to Smithfields. There is also a significant hedge on the property boundary. The plinth would be made as small and unobtrusive as possible.



Siting the bench on the opposite side of the road is not viable as this is not the side of the road that needs a bench.

However another resident, near the entrance to Deben Meadows, has offered to site the bench on a patch of grass outside their property (image 3)



Image 3

Recommendations and things to consider

Members are asked to consider if they wish to continue installing a bench at the original location, change the location to near Deben Meadows or if they feel that the risk of ASB is so great not to install a bench at all.

- If the bench is installed at the original location the only cost incurred by the Council is for the planning application.
- If the bench is installed at the new location this might require a new planning application (£117) or costs associated with the maintenance of the land and the cost of installing a plinth (time and materials – c.£200).
- If the Council wishes to reverse its decision then it must be done in accordance with the Standing Orders:

7. Previous resolutions

a A resolution shall not be reversed within six months except either by a special motion, which requires written notice by at least five councillors to be given to the Proper Officer in accordance with standing order 9 below, or by a motion moved in pursuance of the recommendation of a committee or a sub-committee.

b When a motion moved pursuant to standing order 7(a) above has been disposed of, no similar motion may be moved within a further six months.

Members are asked to:

- Decide if they wish to go ahead with the bench installation as originally agreed, **or**
- Decide if they wish to move the bench to the new location or not install a bench at all. This will require written notice by at least five councillors or by a motion of the Full Council for it to be included on the agenda for the next Full Council meeting in September.

Pip Alder
Clerk, Melton Parish Council

July 2023