

## **Parish Council note of meeting on 13 November 2024 between Culford, West Stow and Wordwell Parish Councillors and Culford School\***

### **Church Access**

- The school supports access to the church
- All parishioners are welcome to park in the Hockey Car Park
- It is acceptable for parishioners who are disabled, or who have limited mobility, to park outside the church, having as much regard as practicable to protecting the grass
- The school will, as far as is reasonably possible, open the iron gates in advance of church services, to allow vehicle access as above. The PCC recognises that there will be occasions when the gates may not be open, or vehicle access may not be possible, because of works or other operational reasons.
- The PCC (including the clergy) will encourage other church or graveyard visitors to arrive on foot, or to park in the Hockey Car Park if coming a long distance. However the school recognises that the PCC can't control visitors who don't contact them in advance. The PCC will work with the school to inform church users or visitors of the above, and to support its implementation. In the first instance, as requested at an earlier meeting with Nick Maunder, the church website pages for Culford now state that prior arrangement with the school is required by visitors when coming on site by car and it is hoped that this will go some way to seeing this happen.
- The vicars will continue to communicate effectively with school contacts in relation to weddings, funerals and other services, and to address any concerns or feedback.
- It was not discussed, but hopefully it is not a concern for clergy and all officers of the church to access the church by vehicle as & when appropriate.
- Again not discussed, but any public events involving the church, such as the Historic Churches Trust Ride and Stride, will be clearly communicated to the school in advance, with the aim of clear understanding and event-appropriate permission for visitors.

### **Driveway Access**

- The section of drive between the church and the main school drive ("the driveway") is not currently a licenced pathway or a recognised public right of way. It is not marked as for public access on the maps displayed around the school grounds or on public footpath maps. The school made a Section 31(6) deposit in May 2010, renewed in 2020, which included the school's position that the driveway is not a public right of way. (As a consequence of that deposit, it is not possible for a right of way over the driveway to have been created at any time since 2010.)
- The school has entirely legitimate concerns that historically some members of the public have treated the school grounds as if it were a public park, rather than private premises containing an educational establishment with young children resident on site, as well as homes for a number of staff and their families. Members of school staff have been abused when challenging use of the school grounds outside the public pathways. That is clearly unacceptable. The parish council fully supports the

school's position on this, and agrees that members of the public should keep to accepted pathways.

- There is a strong view from members of the parish that the new signage installed over the summer, and the subsequent challenges to anyone walking along the driveway, represent a significant change by the school, with the driveway having been walked by many people without challenge or permission for many years, up to the last couple of months. Members of the parish believe that, de facto, the driveway is and always has been an agreed and accepted pathway, even though that was not clearly reflected in the signage. Equally, until the summer there was no signage indicating that the driveway was not publicly accessible - although of course the school cannot realistically mark every private area as not for public access.
- The school has a legal duty to safeguard pupils and residents of the school estate, and their equally strong view is that they need to restrict public access to the clearly marked public rights of way and licenced pathways so they can control where members of the public can go. Anyone not on one of those pathways, including (in the view of the school) anyone walking the driveway, is therefore walking unauthorised on private property and should be prevented from doing so. The school also notes that the driveway passes some staff houses, as well as an entrance to the Sports Centre, with potential privacy and safeguarding risks as a result. The school's view is that if it permits public use of the driveway, it sets a precedent that anyone who has walked anywhere in the school grounds could claim a public right of way, including next to boarders' accommodation or other particularly high risk areas.
- Members of the parish believe that the extensive commercial and sports clubs' use of school premises, including the Sports Centre, and the vehicle traffic associated with that use, means that there are many more users of the school's premises, including of the driveway, who present a much greater safeguarding risk than pedestrians walking the driveway as they have done without any safeguarding incident for many years. They do not understand how removing access from the driveway contributes to increased safeguarding, especially since the main drive runs closer to teaching blocks and school accommodation, and also runs past the Sports Centre, whilst the lower part of the church drive runs past a number of staff homes.
- The school has installed CCTV on other access routes into the school, to help it fulfil its safeguarding duty. Although there is a CCTV camera on the church drive below the church, the school believes that it would have to install further CCTV cameras on the driveway if it were to permit use of the driveway by public pedestrians. That installation would have a significant cost.
- The school also notes that some other schools have successfully moved public rights of way that crossed their premises, in the interests of safeguarding, and that this might have to be an option which the school pursues.
- There are a significant number of people who have been resident in the parish for many years, who say they have walked the driveway as of right (so without challenge or permission) for not less than 20 years prior to 2010, and who have indicated a willingness to complete the Suffolk County Council form to that effect, to apply for registration of the driveway as a new public right of way (a DMMO). The parish council believes that, if a number of people submit the application for a DMMO, with support from the parish council, that would be considered a high priority application and would be determined relatively quickly. It is likely that any such application would

be opposed by the school, with potential cost and delay implications for both the school and the parish council.

- The parish council representatives suggested that they might explore whether the parish council could make a contribution towards the cost of additional CCTV, if that would enable the school to achieve their safeguarding goals on a cost-effective basis. This is expected to be discussed further at the next parish council meeting, on Thursday 28 November.

### **Safe use of the main drive**

- The parish council representatives noted that the main entrance drive to the school (from the phone box on the Street to Culford Hall), which includes a public right of way, can be challenging and unpleasant to walk during peak school drop-off and collection times, particularly in the narrow section near the Street where there is no marked footway. It was noted that this discourages Culford pupils who live in the village from walking to school. It was also noted that the school has an obligation to ensure that this right of way is safe for pedestrians to use.
- The school noted that they do not currently have budget to create a dedicated footway along the full length of this right of way.