

**Dean and Shelton Parish Council**  
**High Street Farm, Upper Dean, PE28 0LY.**

**30<sup>th</sup> August 2019**

**Dear Mr Simpkins,**

**Retaining wall strengthening works alongside the South road to Upper Dean**

At its' meeting of 7<sup>th</sup> August 2019, the members of the Dean and Shelton Parish Council, along with a number of local residents, requested that, as Chairman of the Parish Council, I write on their behalf to make formal complaint to yourself and Senior Officers of the Borough Council concerning the manner in which your staff went about arranging the above works and their apparent disregard for the very real concerns expressed by both the Parish Council, local residents and businesses who contacted you; the Mayor and other officers of the council in advance of the works regarding this matter.

There is no doubt that the strengthening works were necessary and it is fully accepted that in the vicinity of such works; a full road closure is necessary while work is being undertaken at the site. What we fail to understand, is why the closure to all traffic, including emergency services and busses was necessary 24 hours a day, 7 days a week including evenings and weekends when no work is being carried out.

Requests to your staff to open the road at weekends if not possible during the week were met with dismissive responses claiming that to open the road at weekends was not possible, as the cost of moving machinery so that the road could be part opened would add £40,000 to the cost of the contract.

The pictures below show how much machinery that would need to have been moved at each of the two weekends in question, ie:- none all that was there, was a site office, which is a simple caravan that could easily have been moved if necessary. The figure of £40,000 quoted was clearly nonsense



The closure in the middle of harvest time, which for local farmers, is the culmination of a year of work and a time when farm machinery, combine harvesters, tractors, trailers, ploughs, discs and drills are all in use and being moved around the area. Seed and fertiliser is brought in and grain hauliers, routinely use this particular road to shift harvested crops to stores. For the several locally based agricultural repair businesses, this is one of busiest times of the year, with many machines costing hundreds of thousands of pounds, 'down time' caused by breakdowns can be crippling expensive, whether it be own machinery or contractors working on their behalf.

This road, is, in effect one of three major arteries for the three villages, and the only one going south to the surrounding areas including Riseley and Rushden and indeed Bedford.

Showing a very poor lack of organisation; on the first day that the road closure took effect, many people using the signposted diversion route through Tilbrook, found that the main road through Tilbrook village, was completely closed to all traffic, making that diversion route un-usable.

The local pub, which acts as a community hub and provides employment to many younger people from the surrounding villages had significant losses of custom and employees who do not drive had difficulty in getting to work at all. The cost of a 24 mile additional journey to work made a large hole in their relatively small incomes.

Your staff did promise to provide signage at each end of the closed road indicating that businesses in Upper Dean was open as usual, however the only signage seen was a small sign on the B645 at Chelveston which is a considerable distance away from the actual closure and of little use.

As I indicated in the second paragraph of this letter, There is no disputing that the works need to be carried out, and that as the highway authority, you have statutory powers to close roads for essential works, however it is difficult to comprehend why the work could not be organised and arranged so that the necessary working area, (half the road width on the brook side) leaving the other lane to be opened and managed with traffic lights during the periods when no work is being carried out. (ie: evenings and weekends). That of course would need to be arranged and organised by your staff in conjunction with the contractor, and is common practice for minor works of this type. It does not however seem to have been seriously considered.

The few responses received by the many that contacted your council regarding this matter were brief and dismissive, with no apparent attempt to find any form of workable solution that recognised the genuine concerns being raised, and the importance of this particular section of road at the middle of harvest time. It appears that all correspondents were treated by your staff with an attitude of 'it's just a rural village road so closing the road isn't important'. The prevailing attitude seemed to be that 'we have the powers and are going to use them'.

Whilst is clearly too late to change anything in this instance, we would request that staff dealing with similar situations in future, do so in a more sympathetic way, trying to work with local parishes, people and businesses to find solutions that recognise and try to accommodate genuine concerns as in this case.

Please accept this letter as a formal complaint from the Parish Council requiring a written response within the timescales of your complaints procedure.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large capital 'R' followed by a period and a stylized, cursive 'Ward'. The signature is underlined with a single horizontal line.

***Cllr Robert Ward***

Chairman.

Dean and Shelton Parish Council.

Cc Cllr Towler