

## Support for the stopping up of Princes Parade

I am a former Town Clerk for Hythe. Although I live in a different town within the District of Folkestone and Hythe, I have great affection for Hythe and I often cycle to the town – typically at least twice a week. The seafront is stunningly beautiful, whatever the weather. I like to run along the north bank of the RMC to Stade Street, returning along Princes Parade. That's a mostly traffic free 6.2 km route which is perfect for training. I particularly love the Princes Parade section. The long promenade gives me outstanding view of the sea. Whether I am cycling or running, I am protected from the traffic by a flood barrier.

But it could be so much better.

### **1. Benefits to walkers, runners and cyclists**

I ran in the Folkestone Half Marathon in September 2021. It struck me that the route along the coastal path in Folkestone and past the beautiful cottages in Sandgate has sound, vision and traffic fume insulation against the road because of the cliff and the houses. It is not just a flood barrier. The section from the Sandgate village sign to the junction with Princes Parade is the worst part of the run because there are no buildings to protect pedestrians and cyclists, and it is very narrow. Despite the beautiful sea views and views of the golf course, the Princes Parade section is the second worst because it is only protected from traffic pollution by the flood barrier. Ideally walkers, runners and cyclists would like no traffic at all adjacent to the paths they use, and for the path to be significantly wider so there is more room without potential collisions. A fortunate corollary of the development at Princes Parade is that both of these aims (no traffic; a wider path) will be achieved. If the road is stopped up, then it will be so much more pleasant for leisure use.

### **2. Economic benefits**

Not everyone supports more tourism in the district, but a traffic free environment would inevitably be more attractive for people walking, running or cycling on Princes Parade, and would presumably encourage more visitors to spend money in the district. Recently, on an evening trip to Princes Parade, I talked to an amateur astronomer who was visiting because of the dark skies over the channel. Just as he was taking a photograph, a van thundered by, and either the wind from the van or vibration from its engine spoiled his long exposure picture. That's one example of many that could be found of a tourist advantage of a quieter and fume free promenade.

### **3. Equality across the district**

If the seafronts of the district were all to be treated equally, then the homes of some residents in Sandgate, Folkestone and Hythe would have to have their homes demolished to make way for a seafront road. Of course that would be absurd, and no-one would support it since they are not only perfectly liveable and desirable buildings, but they also provide a pollution, sound and visual barrier for users of the promenade. Those residents and their councillors living in existing seaside accommodation within the district such as in Sandgate must see the logic of walkers, runners and cyclists using Princes Parade also being insulated from the noise, sight and pollution of motor traffic, which would be achieved by building sympathetic housing and leisure facilities.

### **4. Improvements to safety**

## Support for the stopping up of Princes Parade

While most motor vehicles thankfully keep to the speed limit, there are some drivers and riders who use Princes Parade as an opportunity for a high-speed blast. Anyone walking, running or cycling along Princes Parade must know this – even if you don't see it, you can hear their engines revving. Additionally, some motorists say that they like to drive along Princes Parade because they get a great view of the sea. That's a huge worry to me. What happens when one of the speeding motorists fails to notice one of the casual motorists gazing out to sea and has a high-speed collision? The potential for a safety catastrophe must help the argument for change. As things stand, it is too dangerous. A reasonable risk assessment would require mitigation, and given that the A259 provides an adjacent alternative, stopping road traffic using Princes Parade is a great way to drastically reduce the risk of injury or death.

### **5. Council tax cost reduction**

I am not aware of anywhere else in the district where a spare road is kept in case the main one is out of use for whatever reason. It cannot be right that council tax payers must pay to maintain two through-roads when the A259 is perfectly adequate. Princes Parade is surplus as a through-road and would be better utilised as a relatively low maintenance path for walkers, runners and cyclists. With its beautiful views across the channel and inland to the start of the North Downs, it should be dedicated for walking, running and cycling, and for access to other leisure activities including sea swimming, pool swimming, fishing and boating. Motorists should stay on the road that is designed to carry the weight of their vehicles.

### **6. Misinformation**

Some people have told me in good faith that allowing the road to be stopped up is a move to make the beach private, or to charge for entry to Princes Parade, or as the first step to closing the golf course. Some of these stories have become urban legends, such that the people recounting them believe they are true, and oppose the stopping up on those grounds. If these stories were accurate, then I would also oppose the stopping up of Princes Parade. As it is, a proportion – I cannot say how large – of the objectors have been misinformed. Assuming that the stopping up goes ahead, I look forward to seeing their concerns and worries replaced by relief at seeing a sympathetic, ecological and pedestrian friendly new development.