

In putting forward this paper, we are not asking the council to suddenly change its mind about the provision of additional parking spaces in the High Street car park. Rather, we ask that you consider the matter from another angle. We believe that our recommendation to engage in some deliberation with the public in High Street along the lines proposed will reduce hostility towards the Council on this issue and allow the Council to show that it is genuinely concerned with meeting the needs of its public while at the same time respecting the needs of the planet.

Please forgive us if the theory explained in the next few paragraphs is already familiar – it was relatively new to us, and probably not widely explored beyond those concerned with good governance. You may find it interesting since we know you are committed to the good governance of North Tawton and the relevance to the town should be clear.

People who work in local government are familiar with the idea that public values sometimes conflict. There have been many learned articles and books devoted to what should be done when one of the values of a local authority conflicts with another value that the authority holds dear. A commitment to the **participation** of local people, for example, can conflict with **efficiency**. If a council wants to gather its constituents' opinions on subject and goes out to consultation on a policy matter, the process of decision making and implementation will take much longer. It won't necessarily be efficient. These are process values in conflict.

Meeting the needs or expressed wishes of citizens can also create a conflict of values. Giving people what they need or are asking for can conflict with **lawfulness**, where rules or current policy would not permit what is requested by the local public.

There are tried and tested strategies through which people – front-line council staff and often councillors themselves – cope with these conflicts. Some allocate the pursuit of certain values to certain departments, so the finance department, for example, is responsible for manifesting integrity and accountability (this strategy is called **firewalls**) and promotes the fact that it does, other councils might *prioritise* their values when they realise they conflict and decide which is more important (the strategy called **bias**), others use a strategy called **cycling** to deal with conflicting values by assigning an importance to one value for a time, and then making something else a priority and thereby diminishing the importance of previous values.

In the case of North Tawton, the public demand for additional parking creates value conflicts, because you cannot directly compare and measure the value of a green space and a car park. They are simply not commensurable. How do you resolve this conflict which is not simply theoretical or ethical: there is anger and distress caused by the lack of legal parking in High Street?

On one hand, most councils would regard **meeting public need** as an important value that should be upheld. It's why most people are motivated to move into local government on one level or the other. In our case, the public need being expressed in many ways and on many fronts – through social media, approaches to councillors and approaches to the members of this committee – is for increased legal parking in High Street. On the other hand, this council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to **minimising its carbon footprint** and **its impact on the environment**. This can mean promoting green spaces and minimising the use of traditional vehicles.

The issue of whether the green space at the top of High Street should be converted to provide car parking space illustrates this conflict perfectly. Clearly, the value behind maintaining a green space and meeting the need for additional parking currently conflict. Most of us support efforts to mitigate climate change and most of us would like additional parking.

How can this conflict be resolved? There are no issues of fact involved here. There are detailed plans for the provision of car parking in the space in question which this group and the full council have seen. A car park would work there, even with the preservation of the protected non-native Chilean Pine. These plans were most recently rejected on the grounds that the land was a green space and had been designated as such by the Neighbourhood Plan.

Our purpose in drafting this paper is to ask the council to recognise that this does not settle the matter and rule out further discussion but demonstrates the existence of a public values conflict which needs to be approached in a considered way. The conflict needs to be grappled with rather than simply dismissed in favour of one or the other without due consideration.

Indeed, this is the approach that a *bias approach* takes. One value is deemed to be more important than the other. However, that conclusion, which *legitimises* a bias in favour of one value over another, should be reached by a process of deliberation, in this case involving evidence of public demand and need, and an objective assessment of the significance of the particular patch of green space in terms of mitigating climate change.

At face value, meeting the needs of local citizens would appear to be an extremely important value for any council.

It is widely known that there is insufficient legal parking in High Street and that residents are forced to park illegally and often dangerously. The contribution to mitigating climate change made by a few square metres of grass in a rural county such as Devon, might be deemed to be fairly insignificant. One should also take into account the additional emissions caused by vehicles circulating in search of a parking space.

As mentioned at the outset, the purpose of this paper is not to request that a decision is made on this matter, but that the process of deliberation be entered into, in public view, so that the importance that should be attributed to each of the conflicting values can be established and measured. If the process of confronting the conflict is properly engaged with, and arguments made known to those affected by the conflict, whichever conclusion is reached is much more likely to meet with acceptance.

At the moment, there is strong feeling on this subject in High Street, and North Tawton has a reputation in the wider community for having poor parking facilities. There is also a strong feeling that the council is resisting public demand and is derelict in failing to meet public need for additional legal parking space.

A process of public deliberation would help resolve the matter – would highlight the council's commitment on climate change as well as its desire to meet public need – and we would urge that the council embark on that process. It should be a win-win situation if everyone can genuinely see which value has been seen to be more important by the public.

Kay Caldwell
Peter Brickley

