

APPLICANT'S STATEMENT, SUS-1188, PATH THROUGH SAXONBURY.

The building named Saxonbury, which is situated between Juggs Road and Kingston Road in Lewes, has been in the hands of Lewes District Council for many years. As its name suggests, part of the grounds contain a Saxon burial ground.

The site is entered from the north by a large gap in the wall giving access to a car park and to the south by a small footpath which runs to from the Kingston Road to a car park.

The building was previously used for the accommodation of homeless people in priority need, but some years ago it was emptied with a view to selling it. One witness, Cllr Wendy Maples, believes that there was a short blockage of the path at this point, but this is not borne out by other users or Lewes District Council. While the site was used for homeless people there were not many cars in the car park, perhaps because homeless people cannot often afford to run cars. For a while the site was empty although I understand that Lewes Council encouraged employees to park their cars there from time to time to deter squatters. One user says that after this the car park was blocked to vehicular access after this, but that pedestrians used the route as usual.

In 2020 it was decided to renovate the building and to turn it into ordinary council housing. In order to do this Lewes District Council blocked the path.

I made a freedom of information request about this and received the following reply:

From: [REDACTED]
To: 'chris.smith'
Cc:
Subject: [SPAM]FOI 14707

Sent: Fri 22/10/2021 11:14

Dear Mr. Smith,

Information Request: FOI 14707

Thank you for your information request dated 16 October 2021 received in our office on the same day.

I have reviewed your request and investigated whether there is any information which can be disclosed to you. Please find below the information the council holds, and which I am pleased to provide to you.

Please provide any information that the council has about when the way through the grounds of Saxonbury from Juggs Road to Kingston Road was blocked off so that the recent renovations could be carried out.

The pedestrian access that crossed the parking area at Saxonbury was closed off during the time the building works were underway, from August 2020 to August 2021, on health and safety grounds. The pedestrian access is not recorded on the ESCC definitive map of public rights of way.

Please also provide any information that the council has about earlier blockages of the way for any reason.

We have no records showing that the pedestrian access has previously been closed off, although the car park area was closed for part of the time it was empty, but this did not prevent pedestrians walking through.

I trust that this deals with your enquiry to your satisfaction, but if you feel that Lewes District Council has misunderstood or not responded appropriately to your request, you have two courses of action:

- You can clarify the terms of your original request to allow this to be looked at again (if you expand your request this will be dealt with as a new request)
- All applicants have a 'right of review'. A review should be focused on the original request and should identify how the council has dealt incorrectly with your Information Request. Reviews must be made in writing (or e-mail) within 40 working days of receipt of this response and addressed to the Information Governance Reviews Officer, to the address below.

Information Governance Reviews Officer
Lewes District Council and Eastbourne Borough Council
Eastbourne Town Hall
Grove Road
Eastbourne
BN21 4UG

The council, as the landowner, does not claim any blockage for pedestrians before August 2020. Nor do they claim to have tried to block access in any way before this date. Therefore I believe that the date the path was called into question is August 2020.

The path is now open and available to use again.

Below are some pictures of the application route prior to August 2020.

The first picture below was taken from Juggs Road. The eastern edge of the entrance can be seen. The western edge is immediately to the right of the picture. As you can see, cars were normally parked at the eastern side of the tarmac, although occasionally cars were parked at the south end when the other areas were full. This would be unusual since the south end is some way from the entrance to the building, which can be seen on the right. The application route goes right at the end of the car park.



The picture below is taken from the Southern entrance. There slabs in the verge which appear to be designed to aid pedestrian access. According to the highway terrier this verge is part of the highway.

There is no evidence of a gate in the picture and I do not recall one. But it may have always been open or concealed in the undergrowth or both. The path bears right beyond the gate to meet the car park. You can see that the gate is roughly parallel with the eastern edge of the building. I drew it slightly to the east in the map produced for users, but I do not think that this is significant.



The user evidence forms suggest that users walked down the middle of the car park, which is likely if cars were parked at the sides. However one person claims to have gone right through or above the Saxonbury building. Presumably this is an indication that they came from the west and continued going west rather than a claim to have gone through the building at points where there were and are no entrances.

There are 38 evidence forms, indicating the popularity of the route. In one case the date of first use was not given so I have added the email reply giving this. In another, only the front was returned. Given the large numbers of forms I do not think it is worth chasing this. I include the front for completeness.

As an appendix I attach the original form with covering letter circulated to users by door-to-door leafletting in the area and also placed on my web site. This shows the instructions given to users.

Chris Smith for the Ramblers.