

Court: Bristol motorist drove down road closed for children's playtime

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By Geoff Bennett

The case was heard at Bristol Crown Court

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A WOMAN who drove along a road which was closed to traffic so children could play out in the street has been banned from getting behind the wheel and ordered to stay at home after 9pm every night.

Stonebridge Park in Fishponds was shut to traffic, but motorist Chelsie Rees thought the closure didn't apply to her.

The 20-year-old of Ridgeway Road, Fishponds told organisers: "You've got no right to close the road."

When a concerned resident tapped on her bonnet, the beautician abruptly braked her Vauxhall Corsa, got out and a confrontation ensued, Bristol Crown Court heard.

She then got back into her car, continued up the road and had to mount the pavement to navigate barriers at the other end.

Rees pleaded guilty to careless driving and threatening behaviour in June last year.

Sentencing her, Recorder Mr Wright told her: "Your conduct that day was criminal and disgraceful. The impact on the Playing Out Scheme was substantial.

"The Playing Out Scheme is extremely valuable for the local community."

Rees, who is 17 weeks pregnant, shed a tear as she was fined £50, disqualified from driving for six months and handed six penalty points on her driving licence.

Because she previously had three points put on her licence, for jumping a red traffic light, and she has been driving for less than two years the extra points mean her licence should be revoked and she will have to retake her driving test.

However, the law states she cannot be banned and receive the points, which means the sentence will have to be adjusted to leave just one or the other in due course.

Rees was also told to observe a six-month curfew, in which she must stay at home on electronic tag from 9pm to 6am, and a victim surcharge of £60. She declined to comment as she left court.

James Haskell, prosecuting, said residents in the street applied to Bristol City Council for the road closure as part of the Playing Out Scheme, which began in 2009.

Mr Haskell said residents of Stonebridge Park were granted permission, between April 2013 and March this year, to close the road between Ridgeway Road and Shamrock Road every other Sunday from 3pm to 6pm.

During the closure, volunteer stewards were stationed at each end of Stonebridge Park only allowing residents to drive along the road at "walking pace". Rees drove along the street when a barrier was removed to allow a taxi to gain access.

Despite a resident indicating the road was closed, Rees ignored them and drove on saying: "You've got no right to close the road."

Halfway along the street, Rees suddenly braked and got out after a resident tapped on her bonnet.

After an argument she got back in the car and drove, mounting the pavement to avoid the barrier at the other end of the street.

Rees initially denied driving in the way alleged to police, and complained of residents' behaviour which caused her to drive off because she was scared, Mr Haskell said.

David Maunder, defending, said: "The driving was not dangerous. At no stage were children put at risk.

"The additional expense of having to reacquire her driving licence by taking a further driving test will have a very severe consequence on her insurance premium in future. That is a very severe financial penalty."