

MINUTES of the meeting of Environment Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday, 24th January, 2005 at 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor J.H.R. Goodwin (Chairman)
Councillor W.L.S. Bowen (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors: P.J. Dauncey, G.W. Davis, Mrs. A.E. Gray, K.G. Grumbley, T.W. Hunt, R. Mills, J.W. Newman and Miss F. Short

In attendance: Councillors B.F. Ashton, A.C.R. Chappell, J.W. Edwards, P.E. Harling, R.I. Matthews, Ms. G.A. Powell, Mrs. S.J. Robertson, J.P. Thomas and R.M. Wilson (Cabinet Member – Highways and Transportation)

42. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor P.J. Edwards (Cabinet Member – Environment) and Councillor G.V. Hyde (Cabinet Member – Economic Development, Markets & Property)

43. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)

There were no substitutions.

44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

45. REVIEW OF THE COUNTY-WIDE PARKING STRATEGY

The Committee considered the findings of the Parking Strategy Review Group following the review of the County-wide Parking Strategy.

The Chairman of the Review Group, Councillor J.H.R. Goodwin, reminded the Committee that at its meeting on 21st October, 2003, when the call-in of the Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) decision on Parking Charges was considered, the Committee recommended to the Cabinet Member that the County-wide Parking Strategy be reviewed. This recommendation was subsequently endorsed by Cabinet and the Cabinet Member requested that this Committee carry out the review. On 23rd January, 2004 this Committee formed the Parking Strategy Review Group and approved the terms of reference for the review.

The Chairman of the Review Group took the Committee through the report on a page by page basis and particularly highlighted the following:

- a) The scope of the review was detailed in Annex 1 to the report. The methodology used in the review was referred to in section 3 and the current Parking Strategy had been attached at Annex 2 to the report.
- b) Details of the consultation techniques employed and the results were contained in a separate document issued to Members – entitled The

Consultation Report.

- c) Financial Overview (section 4). Income from off-street parking (car parks) contributed over £1m to keeping the Council tax lower. On-street parking enforcement (decriminalised parking) was intended under the Business Plan to be self-financing with any surplus ring-fenced to transport related purposes. It was appreciated that a balance needed to be struck between the financial worth (income generated) and the strategic worth (long-term benefits of the property within the Council's property portfolio) of any individual car park. During the course of the review it became apparent that current data collection methods made it difficult to obtain data on each car park notably that administration was charged across the whole service.
- d) The Review Group's comments in relation to the key questions raised in the Scoping Statement were detailed in section 5 of the report.
- e) Park & Ride (section 6). From the evidence collected and comments from users concerning the pressure on parking, the Review Group concluded that the Cabinet Member should continue with the ongoing work into the financial and operational viability of a Park and Ride scheme for Hereford.
- f) Policy Linkages (section 7.2) The Review Group agreed with the Policy Linkages identified in the current Strategy. However, it was highlighted that they should be reviewed or updated, particularly in relation to the Council's Corporate Plan.
- g) Supply and Quality (section 7.3). From evidence received the Review Group concluded that car parks in central Hereford were effectively full. Parking issues may also arise as a consequence of changes to the Government's Planning Policy & Guidance concerning new planning development. Evidence also indicated that car parks should be safe, well signed, attractive, easy to use and well maintained.
- h) A new Local Transport Plan, of which the Parking Strategy forms a part, was currently being prepared.
- i) Charging (section 7.5). The Review Group agreed that parking charges should be reviewed (but not necessarily increased) on an annual basis, in accordance with current principles but this should not rule out periodic reviews. The Review Group recognised that there may be benefits to "Pay on Exit" systems and this method of fee collection should be kept under review. However, the current cost of installation etc. could be significant and therefore currently could not be justified.
- j) Town Specific Statements (section 7.6). The Review Group had considered the relevant Town Specific Statements in the current Strategy and generally supported the statements for inclusion into a new Strategy. A number of points were also raised for consideration by the Cabinet Member as detailed in the report.
- k) Hereford (section 7.6.1). Additional parking supply should be in the form of Park & Ride. On-street charging should only be introduced to support the business case for Park & Ride.
- l) Ross-on-Wye (section 7.6.1). An area should be identified for free parking.
- m) Bromyard (section 7.6.1). New parking provision should be identified.
- n) Leominster (section 7.6.1). To enable proper control of the former staff car park in Etnam Street this area should be incorporated into the main Etnam Street car park.
- o) Kingston (7.6.1). The charge time at Mill Street should commence at 9.00 a.m. on the grounds that this would greatly benefit school traffic and that little financial benefit was gained from starting at 8.00 a.m.
- p) Residents Parking (section 7.7). The Review Group supported the current scheme. They wished to highlight that the current scheme provided for two passes to be issued to residents. One was for the resident - 'the resident pass', and one that can be issued by the resident for use by any visitor or tradesmen to the property - 'the visitor pass'. The Review Group considered

it inappropriate to introduce an additional scheme for issuing temporary passes for trade vehicles visiting the area. The current scheme should however be amended to allow for partial refunds of returned passes to encourage residents who move house to return their passes so that they can be issued to the new resident, or property owner in the case of renovating their property prior to re-letting.

- q) Disabled People (section 7.8.2). National regulations govern the Blue or Orange Badge holder schemes. However, from the evidence received, the Review Group recommended that enforcement, from within current resources, should be targeted to ensure the availability of disabled parking spaces.
- r) VIPs, Councillors and Council Staff Parking (paragraph 7.8.3) In view of the potential effect on staff accommodation arising from the Property Management Scrutiny Review and the adoption of the Council's Green Travel Plan, the Review Group recommended that the concession be kept under review.
- s) Pensioners Concession (section 7.8.4). The Review Group considered the operation, cost and take-up rate of the 'Home Town' parking concession scheme and questioned whether this concession could be seen as encouraging the use of the car which was contrary to the Council's aim of encouraging public transport use. The Review Group suggested that the Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) consider the withdrawal of this concession.
- t) Tourism (section 8). Having considered evidence based on tourist issues, the Review Group made a number of recommendations and these were set out in the report.
- u) HGV Parking (section 9). In view of the M50, A49 and other arterial roads in the County, the Review Group considered that the identification and provision of suitable HGV parking should be included in any future parking strategy.
- v) The recent 'Property Management Scrutiny Review' (section 10) identified a need to ensure that the Council takes the current and future property needs into account when planning the future of car parking services. The Review Group supported this and recognised the importance of ensuring that car parks were located in suitable places and that they continued to meet needs. The Review Group highlighted the continued importance of retaining the current level of supply in Hereford and ensuring that car parks were convenient and met the needs of shoppers, visitors and commuters. In considering this issue at a strategic level the Review Group were of the opinion that a more in-depth review was necessary to examine in detail the property requirements of the parking service. In addition the review should take into account the development of Park and Ride for Hereford and the identified additional parking requirement in Bromyard.

The Chairman thanked the public and the many organisations that had taken part in the review.

The Committee debated the report during which the following principal points were noted:

- 1) The Director of Environment clarified a number of budgetary issues concerning the difference between car park income and decriminalised parking income and the use of the two forms of revenue. He emphasised that surplus car park income contributed to the overall budget and was not ring fenced whereas decriminalised parking enforcement income offset the cost of enforcement with any surplus being ring fenced for transportation measures.
- 2) While aware of the principals of 'Pay on Exit', the Review Group had not explored the likely costs involved but believed these to be significant due

to the equipment and manning costs and the loss of parking spaces through the installation of the equipment. The Head of Highways and Transportation advised that 'Pay on Exit' was more suited to large high turnover car parks.

- 3) In relation to the suggested withdrawal of the parking concession for pensioners, concern was expressed regarding the recent reduction in bus services, the lack of bus shelters and the high percentage of elderly in the County. In response to why the Review Group had only suggested that the Cabinet Member consider the withdrawal of the pensioner parking concession (see 7.8.9 (d) rather than making a firm recommendation, the Chairman explained that the Review Group recognised that the Cabinet Member would have a more up to date knowledge of the Council's overall budgetary position.
- 4) The Review Group had considered that no further comment had been necessary concerning the Key Actions referred to in paragraph 1.2 and Annex 3, as many actions had been achieved or work was ongoing.
- 5) Responding to a request for a definition of 'strategic worth' (paragraph 4.5) the Chairman of the Review commented that wherever possible all costs and income relating to individual car parks should be ascertained. Added into the equation should be the capital value of the site and the value to the Council of holding that site e.g. for long-term development, or the specific function it served e.g. its contribution to the local economy or facilities.
- 6) The Transportation Manager clarified the statement at paragraph 7.3.1 concerning Hereford car parks being effectively full. Traffic levels had risen since the parking surveys at Annex 4 & 5 had been undertaken. In essence the higher the occupancy levels the more time people spent searching for spaces. In operational terms over 85% occupancy inferred the car park was effectively full. It was agreed that in this instance the report should have referred to Central Hereford car parks.
- 7) Responding to a question concerning managing the availability of parking spaces the Chairman commented that there should be clear signage on approach routes and these should be clear about the type of parking available. The possible future introduction of 'intelligent signs' to advise that a car park was full could assist in reducing the amount of circulating traffic searching for a space. The Review Group had not specified the cost of 'intelligent signage as this would be dependent on the scale of implementation.
- 8) The administration cost of partial refunds for residents passes, referred to in paragraph 7.3.4 [1.3], was considered to be minimal and such an amendment to the scheme would facilitate the early sale of new passes to new residents.
- 9) In response to comments concerning maintenance issues (referred to at 7.3.4 [1.3]), the Committee noted that the Environment Directorate held a list of car parks requiring maintenance.
- 10) The Review Group clarified the reference to 'a need for more time limited parking restrictions in shopping areas', referred to in paragraph 7.5.5. [3.1], as the need to generally improve the turnover of on-street spaces in the Market Towns, particularly when traffic orders are revised.
- 11) The Committee noted that overall parking provision in Bromyard had reduced following the recent development of a number of sites (see 7.6.1[Bromyard]). The Review Group had identified the need for new provision in Bromyard as part of the review of the service property requirements, referred to at paragraph 10.1. Reference was made to the difficulty in parking in the Rowberry Street free car park, due to long-term parking, including it was thought by Council staff. The Committee questioned whether implementing time restrictions, rather than charging,

on Rowberry Street could improve the turnover of spaces.

- 12) The Chairman explained that establishing the 'strategic worth' of a car park (paragraph 4.5) should inform the review of Property Needs (paragraph 10.1). The Review Group felt that this suggested action should then assist in identifying performance management objectives for the service, as referred to in the 'desired outcomes' for the review specified in Annex 1 to the report.
- 13) In clarifying the statement at 7.6.1 [Ross] recommending consideration of the identification of free parking in Ross, the Committee were informed that unlike the other Market Towns in the County, Ross had no designated free car park.

The Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) thanked the Committee for undertaking the review. In relation to a Park and Ride scheme he informed the Committee that initial work on identifying potential operators and parking locations was underway. However, problems were being experienced in identifying suitable routes for park and ride busses to use. He also informed the Committee that at this point in time he did not intend to withdraw parking concessions for the elderly, but appreciated the Review Group raising the issue in the report as a possible option for future consideration.

RESOLVED: That subject to including that the Cabinet Member consider the possible implementation of time restrictions on Rowberry Street car park at Bromyard, the conclusions contained in the Parking Strategy Review report be endorsed and the report be submitted to the Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) for consideration.

The meeting ended at 11.30 a.m.

CHAIRMAN