

Task and Finish Group

Notes of the Meeting on 22 August 2019

Present: Cllr Drake (Chair), Cllr Devonshire, Cllr Wylie, Cllr Stevenson

Officers in Attendance: Ben Wood, Andrew Pulham

Witnesses: Dominic Woods - Hertford trader
Ausra Bitinaite - Hertford Town Council

Absent: Cllr Bell

1. Apologies for absence

None received.

2. Notes of meeting on 23 July

These were agreed without amendment.

3. Presentations on Hertford town centre parking issues

(i) Hertford Town Council

Ausra Bitinaite gave a presentation based on comments received from local residents and businesses. The views of the latter group had been augmented a meeting with Hertford traders on 15 July.

Details of this presentation are contained within the accompanying document – **Appendix A**

Members expressed their concern about the revenue losses the Council could expect to sustain from increasing the free parking period in its car parks from 30 minutes to 1hr and asked how this might be recovered. For example, should the Council charge at other times, such as on Sundays, to offset the loss?

(ii) Dominic Woods (on behalf of Hertford Traders)

Dominic expressed his support for the points made by Ausra in her presentation.

In terms of some possible short term 'wins', Dominic made the following comments and proposals:

- Car Park directional signage on the approach roads to the town is poor. Traders do not expect sophisticated electronic signs with real time capacity figures, but could extra directional signage and capacity counts of each car park be erected?

- The town's 'offer' is strong in the evenings; therefore there is perhaps little need to offer further support at this time. It is in the *daytime* when support is needed, whether through giving additional free parking time in car parks (and in the free bays on street) and/or creating a 'Free After Three' initiative (or similar).
- The taxi rank on Railway Street is particularly problematic, especially when taxis block the adjacent loading bay. Can it be removed and replaced with 30 minute or 1hr free bays, with the taxis being relocated to Fore Street daytime AND evening?
- Could the Council offer a cheaper rate for parking on Saturdays and/or further increase the free parking period on that day?
- Could the Council offer a form of season ticket for town workers to park in the less well used car parks in the town, such as Old River Lane and the Harthams? This would have the benefit of freeing up desirable town centre space for visitors.
- Could signage in the Council's car parks be improved to emphasise the FREE element of the offer?
- Could the Council use its influence to encourage Chase New Homes Ltd, who have acquired the Bircherley Green site, to re-open the car park as soon as possible?

In terms of further concerns and some possible longer term proposals, Dominic made the following comments and proposals:

- There is clearly insufficient parking for Hertford East Station. This is leading to commuter parking in residential streets nearby and also in nearby car parks such as Gascoyne Way, meaning that workers and visitors can struggle to find a space. Can the Council assist in finding additional parking for the station?
- A large number of new homes are being built and planned for Hertford and the associated provision for cars does not match true levels of car ownership. In the worst cases, e.g. on the Ware Road, this is leading to significant parking problems and accidents.

Members (and Ben Wood) offered the following comments and questions in response to this presentation.

- If traders were offered a choice between a 'Free After Three' type scheme or more free parking during the day, which would they prefer?
Dominic suggested a longer period of free parking throughout the day would be more advantageous as it would be available to all motorists at all times.
IT WAS AGREED that this question would be put to the first meeting of the Hertford Traders Association due to take place on 9 September and that Dominic would feed back the answer to the T&F Group.
- If the Council could make its 126 space staff car park at Wallfields available free of charge to town centre workers on Saturdays and Sundays, would that help?
Dominic suggested that although this would certainly be appreciated, the request to offer discounted parking to town workers Monday-Friday should remain on the table.
IT WAS AGREED that the Council *should* make its car park available to workers as soon as is practicable and that appropriate steps would be taken to communicate this to local businesses.

- In respect of Bircherley Green, Chase New Homes doesn't yet own the site; however the Council has had an early meeting with them and is encouraging them to re-open the car park and toilets asap, to allow pedestrians to walk through the precinct once again and to allow pop-up shops in the precinct in the run-up to Christmas. Any news will be communicated to the traders and the Town Council asap.

Dominic Wood and Ausra Bitinaite left the meeting at this point.

4. Discussion on the presentations

In respect of the comments/proposals made during the presentations:

- Members supported the request for more and better directional signage in the approach roads to the town.
IT WAS AGREED that officers would progress this at the earliest opportunity.
- Members committed to giving further consideration to the request for longer free parking time in car parks. Members asked for financial modelling to be undertaken to show the effect of increasing the free period from 30 minutes to one hour.
- Members requested a review of on-street limited waiting bays in Hertford to see whether any could usefully be converted from a 30min to a 1hr maximum stay.
- Members requested a review of the taxi stand/rank arrangements in Railway Street and Fore Street with a view to removing the perceived nuisance of taxis parking in Railway Street during the day.
- In respect of concerns over residential developments in and around the town, Members noted that parking standards within planning policies was not part of this Group's remit.
- In respect of Bircherley Green, Members noted the advice given by Ben Wood earlier in the meeting and agreed there was nothing the Council could *currently* do over and above this.
- In respect of Blue Badge provision in car parks, Members requested a review of the current position with a view to increasing provision where possible towards the 6% guideline issued by the Department for Transport. Members requested also that the Council consider charging Blue Badge holders parking in its car parks, albeit perhaps at a reduced rate.
- In respect of giving Hertford workers free parking on Saturdays in the Council's staff car park at Wallfields, Members expressed a view that businesses in other towns such as Bishop's Stortford might reasonably expect their workers to be offered a similar concession. That concern notwithstanding, the earlier commitment to implementing this in Hertford at the earliest opportunity was reiterated.
- Members supported requiring EHDC staff to pay for their parking and were reminded that this proposal along with a number of options had been discussed in the recent past. Members requested that these proposals be resurrected and progressed.
- Members agreed that a discounted permit scheme for town centre workers should be considered, although they agreed that if implemented it should apply across all towns.
- In respect of commuters parking around Hertford East station and in Gascoyne Way car park, Members agreed that plans already in place to alter the mix of parking in Gascoyne way to increase the proportion of short stay only parking bays are likely to have a beneficial effect.

- In respect of parking problems in certain areas such as the Ware Road, Members agreed this should perhaps be looked at as part of the RPZ review scheduled for 24 September.
- In respect of parking standards associated planning permission for new homes being built in the town, Members agreed this is not a matter for consideration by this Group.

5. Any other business

Members sought clarification of the 'next steps' in respect of the findings and recommendations they will make as part of their work. Ben Wood confirmed that the Group's role is indeed to make findings and recommendations which will be reported to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 December. From there the O&S Committee may wish to support the T&F Group's recommendations in a report to the Executive. It will be for the Executive to respond to these recommendations and to take action if agreed.

Members noted the position statement issued jointly by Rhys Thomas and Isabel Brittain setting out Hertford Theatre's position vis a vis parking and the planned redevelopment of the theatre.

Members were advised that the launch of the survey of residents in relation to RPZs had been delayed slightly, but that its launch was imminent. The survey will run until 13 September and a summary of responses will be prepared in time for the meeting on 24 September.

Members requested that ALL EHDC Councillors be emailed after the Bank Holiday to advise of this RPZ survey, with the request that they draw it to the attention of their residents. **(ACTION BW)**.

Members held open the possibility of holding one or more additional sessions, possibly after O&S Committee on 10 December, to examine the issue of car park tariffs in detail.

Date and times of next meetings

24 September at 1900hrs – Review of RPZs

Charrington's House

Witness – Sally Andrews

15 October at 1900hrs – Parking Policy and Climate Change/Sustainability

Wallfields (Room 27)

Witnesses – HCC Highways officers plus David Thorogood.

12 November at 1900hrs – Wrap-up Meeting

Charrington's House