

Task and Finish Group

Notes of the Meeting on 23 July 2019

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

Officers in Attendance: Ben Wood, Andrew Pulham

Invited Guests: Karen Burton, Gina Thomas – Bishop's Stortford BID

1. Apologies

None received.

2. BID Presentation

The different and occasionally conflicting requirements of business workers and the visitors on which businesses depend, was acknowledged. Difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff in the context of opportunities in nearby towns and the nearby airport, where parking for workers is often free, were also explained.

Whilst EHDC parking charges were thought to be reasonable, a lack of overall parking capacity in the town centre was identified as being a contributory to the town's current parking difficulties. Commuters tend to occupy many of the town centre car parks before workers arrive and the problem is exacerbated by the fact the station car park is considerably more expensive than EHDC car parks. The BID understood the difficulties in balancing these requirements – town centre visitors are their customers so they don't want to parking spaces to be taken up with staff. Equally they can't run a successful business without staff and the BID is aware of recruitment issues (e.g. in Waitrose) where they have lost people to Stansted Airport because they can park there for free. Although the daily charge is relatively small this adds up over a year and for a staff member on a low wage it can make a significant difference.

Possible strategies/actions proposed by the BID were then outlined. These are within the BID Business Plan which was agreed by their members and therefore the BID Board has a mandate to progress these wherever feasible

- A 'Park on my Drive' Scheme

This would seek to match local residents with a vacant driveway during the day, with motorists coming into town to work. This would be a private arrangement between the parties, with no input required from EHDC or the BID, other than the BID perhaps needing to identify the right platform and promote it locally.

- A 'Parking Buddy' Scheme

The idea of having volunteers dotted around car parks at particularly busy times, such as Christmas was also discussed. These volunteers would assist in areas such as pointing out vacant parking spaces, advising of alternative car parks and giving out leaflets/maps of the town centre and local businesses. The BID are confident this can be managed within their existing resources

- 'Free After Three'

Introducing some form of free parking arrangement after 3pm was discussed. This could take many forms, with the months of the year/days of the week/included car parks all to be agreed.

BW & AP suggested that there is little evidence either way as to whether such a concept would be successful in delivering an economic stimulus. Would it generate new customers or would it simply cause existing customers to come into town at a slightly different time of the day? If the town's car parks are already at or close to capacity, is it wise to seek to stimulate additional demand? Overall the link between pricing and visits is quite tenuous in terms of evidence and the only way to produce any empirical data is to run a trial and evaluate it in due course.

BW noted that the EHDC would need to approve a trial and this would be a policy decision for the portfolio holder for parking and ultimately Executive to agree. As part of this decision Members would need to consider the cost of implementation, the loss of income, the length of the trial and an evaluation methodology in conjunction with the BID.

The T&F group were supportive of the BID business plan objectives (including the 'Free After Three' initiative) and as part of its report to Scrutiny is likely to recommend that the Council supports this trial. In the meantime they asked BW to provide information including the costs, loss of income and what an evaluation methodology looks like.

Although not an explicit action with the BID business plan a discussion was had on existing Resident Permit Zones (RPZs). Some streets in some RPZs appear to be empty during the working day. Could worker parking be allowed in on a managed basis?

The experience of offering business permits in the 'Chantry' RPZ was discussed. There had been only limited take-up of the permits on offer. Reasons for this were identified as possibly:

- Lack of awareness among town centre workers.
- Catchment area not sufficiently wide.
- Scheme terms not sufficiently flexible/user friendly.
- Requirement to pay 1yr 'up front' unaffordable for some workers – could a monthly DD be offered?

BW noted that no evaluation of this scheme has taken place but that it could be a solution for supporting staff in town centre businesses. The T&F Group agreed that this evaluation should take place as soon as possible to help inform discussions and that the portfolio holder be asked to instruct officers to undertake this work.

In respect of other RPZs that could potentially accommodate worker parking on a managed basis, it was agreed that offering residents in these areas a discount on their permit price as an incentive would be an important element of the strategy.

The possibility of areas of off-street parking being given over to exclusive use by town centre workers was discussed. The advisability of encouraging town centre workers to park slightly outside the town centre, thus freeing up more space for the visitors on which businesses depend, was also discussed. No firm proposals were made in these areas.

(The members of the Bishop's Stortford BID left the meeting at this point).

3. Discussion of Town Centre Parking Issues

a. AECOM Report

The AECOM 'Bishop's Stortford Parking Strategy', issued in May 2019, was discussed. AP identified this as being a quality document, containing much valuable analysis and some helpful proposals for addressing parking challenges in Bishop's Stortford. The T&F Group was recommended to take note of this Strategy when considering its own proposals for changes to parking arrangements in the town.

b. ORL/Goods Yard/Future Developments

The state of flux that characterises parking arrangements in Bishop's Stortford at present was acknowledged. The net gain in parking spaces that may be engendered by a new MSCP on the Northgate End site and by the building of new MSCPs on the Goods Yard site was also discussed. The charges levied at the station (approx. £10/day) were identified as problematic, as this appears to result in a number of commuters occupying EHDC car parks from early in the morning, thus leaving few spaces for workers and shoppers. The parking standards proposed for residential developments on the Goods Yard site were also felt to be a problem, as it was believed these would be 0.5 per dwelling.

IT WAS AGREED that on behalf of the T&F Group HD would write to Network Rail challenging their current parking charges and requesting that they reduce the daily charge to something closer to the prevailing all day charge in the town centre.

IT WAS AGREED that the T&F Group would encourage the setting up of a car club on the Goods Yard site (and ideally an electric car club) and that the developer should be encouraged to fund this, perhaps by way of S106 contributions. This would form part of the recommendations of the Group to Scrutiny.

The view of the T&F Group was that the Council should seek to ensure that new *and regular* bus services are implemented at an early stage in conjunction with new housing developments, so that public transport becomes a natural choice for residents as soon as they move into their new accommodation.

c. Airport Parking

Problems generated by 'airport parking' on residential streets were discussed. The existence of a website and phone number whereby residents could complain to MAG about perceived examples of airport parking was discussed. Also discussed was the fund administered by MAG to help address problems associated with 'airport parking' and wider traffic management problems associated with the airport. Members suggested the existence of the reporting system is not well known among residents and that MAG is only likely to offer funding for schemes in EHDC if there is evidence of a chronic problem in the area.

IT WAS AGREED that residents should be encouraged to notify MAG of 'airport parking' problems and that the Council should be encouraged to publicise the number and website as widely as possible.

The possibility of local schools offering holidaymakers use of their car parks in the summer holidays was also discussed. Whilst Members were unsure how this would work in terms of legalities and practicalities, it was suggested this could generate useful additional income for the schools.

IT WAS AGREED that this would constitute an 'in principle' recommendation by the T&F Group, albeit the parameters of such an arrangement would need to be identified and it would be a matter for individual schools to progress.

d. Commuter Parking

The T&F Group suggested that current policy makes it difficult for residents to secure the implementation of a new RPZ in their area, because of the stringency of the qualifying criteria.

IT WAS AGREED that the T&F Group would recommend a review of current policy in this area, to help residents apply for and obtain an RPZ, where commuter parking is held to be a problem.

In respect of other aspects of commuter parking, IT WAS AGREED that platforms encouraging car sharing should be identified and promoted, in the hope that this bears down on car use and the number of parking acts in the town.

e. LTP4 Imperatives

BW recommended that Members should seek to be conversant with the main thrust of HCC's LTP4, where this sets out the County Council's commitments in respect of traffic management and sustainability. Members suggested that EHDC officers should possibly be more rigorous in their challenge of HCC officers when the latter offer assertions as to the traffic management implications of new developments across the district.

4. Any Other Business

The need for more and better electric vehicle charging points across the town was discussed and agreed. IT WAS AGREED that the T&F Group would advocate the installation of new charging points at key locations, including in the new MSCP at Northgate End. IT WAS AGREED also that the T&F Group would advocate the mandatory installation of charging facilities associated with the building of new residential and business accommodation in the town.

IT WAS AGREED that due to workload and time constraints, the strand of inquiry relating to parking standards as part of planning policy would be deleted from the T&F Group's agenda, with these issues to be addressed as part of the Group's work in the remaining three areas (town centre parking, RPZs and sustainability/climate change).

IT WAS AGREED that (in line with a decision made at the meeting on 27 June) EHDC would invite residents in existing RPZs to complete a simple online survey to obtain their views of the scheme and perhaps test their attitude to modifications, such as the introduction of 'shared use' parking where possible. BW to action. HD will send some previous work undertaken with residents on their appetite for an RPZ

IT WAS AGREED that parking changes associated with the development of Hertford Theatre should be better understood and that Rhys Thomas should be asked to give a short update in this area. AP to action.

5. Date and Time of Next Meeting

Due to a diary clash it was agreed that the next meeting would take place on 22 August at 1730hrs, at Wallfields.

- BW to ask Hertford traders to send representatives to give evidence at this meeting.
- BW to invite Hertford Town Council to give evidence at this meeting.

The meeting closed at 2045