

Task and Finish Group

Notes of the Meeting on 24 September 2019

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

Officers in Attendance: Laura Pollard - EHDC Intern Policy Officer
Andrew Pulham - T&F Support Officer (and witness in respect of agenda items 3 & 4)

Witnesses: Cllr J Kaye, Cllr G Cutting
Sally Andrews - EHDC Interim parking Manager

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from Cllr M Stevenson and Ben Wood.

2. Notes of Meeting on 22 August

These were agreed without amendment.

3. Presentation and Q&A on RPZ Policy

i) Cllr J Kaye

Cllr Kaye spoke in respect of the presentation he had submitted in advance of the meeting.

Cllr Kaye advised he was aware of many and regular requests for RPZs from Ware residents; however these are languishing on the waiting list held by EHDC. Is there not a case for these to be progressed?

Cllr Kaye suggested roads around our historic town centres, including in Ware should be considered for RPZs as part of a process of 'decluttering' the streets. In the case of Ware he felt the introduction of one or more RPZs would certainly assist, not least by preventing their exploitation by commuters, to the detriment of local residents.

Cllr Kaye acknowledged the importance of good design in respect of any new RPZs – i.e. they should operate for the minimum duration necessary to deter commuters, perhaps just one hour in the middle of the day, to ensure maximum flexibility and the availability of the roads for classes of user other than commuters.

In respect of business parking, Cllr Kaye suggested a possible need for some form of permit scheme as part of a solution to problem parking in areas of Ware such as Marsh Lane, again as a result of commuters impeding the ability of local businesses to function effectively. Royal Mail in particular is having problems accommodating its staff on or near the site and in extreme cases

lorries are unable to access properties and/or turn due to the presence of inconsiderately parked vehicles.

Cllr G Cutting

Cllr Cutting spoke in respect of the situation in Bishop's Stortford. He advised the town's parking problems are becoming more and more acute and are likely to continue to do so, in part due to the parking standards associated with the new developments taking place throughout the town but also as the town's car parks are operating close to or even at capacity on an increasingly frequent basis. Cllr Cutting suggested that RPZs can be part of the solution to these problems. Cllr Cutting suggested also that new technology might have the potential to help ensure that any new RPZs implemented could operate to maximum effect.

Cllr Cutting also identified potential problems that may arise following the re-development of the Grange Paddocks Leisure Centre, should provision of parking on-site not increase to meet the likely increased demand.

In summary, Cllr Cutting suggested the following:

- A review of the current EHDC RPZ Policy and Operational Guidance is long overdue.
- The wider picture, including car park charging and the potential of new technology must also be part of the solution.
- The needs of commuters (i.e. to and from railway stations) should rank below those of other categories of users such as residents, town workers and visitors.

In the ensuing discussion, Members on the T&F Group expressed support for a review of the existing RPZ Policy and Operational Guidance and for a design approach to RPZs that might mean that they operate for perhaps one or two hours in the middle of the day, thus achieving their main objective of driving out commuter parking whilst preserving maximum benefit for residents and sufficient flexibility to allow casual parking on a limited basis.

Members noted also the current policy position that the identification of non-core funding (e.g. S106 funding) is normally required before a new RPZ can be considered and felt that this aspect of the Policy should also be reviewed.

In respect of Bishop's Stortford, Members supported involving the BID in any discussions of designing schemes that could accommodate parking by town workers, on a managed basis.

In respect of Watton at Stone, Cllr Bell advised of significant parking problems being experienced by residents in the vicinity of the station and school, which it is felt will only get worse as more development takes place. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that buses serving the town more or less cease to run by 6pm, leading to many people needing to use their car to drive to the station.

Cllr Kaye suggested similar problems are being experienced by many residents in Stanstead Abbots.

Members asked a number of questions as follows:

Q. Do we have to charge the same for all RPZs?

A. No. Different charges for different schemes and even differential charging within the *same* scheme is perfectly possible. The overriding principle is that by law, local authorities are not permitted to seek to make a surplus from on-street charging. Should a surplus be made inadvertently, this must be ring-fenced for expenditure on areas such as car park improvements and subsidies for public transport. Andrew Pulham advised Members of a report to the Council three or four years ago which had confirmed that RPZs in East Herts do not generate a surplus once operating and enforcement costs have been taken into account.

Q. Could we mitigate permit charges for residents in RPZs where they were prepared to accept 'outsider' parking on a managed basis?

A. Yes, this would be entirely possible. Members agreed this approach could be employed to mitigate permit charges to residents in RPZ areas where those residents were prepared to accept 'outsider' parking (e.g. by town workers) on a managed and charged basis.

Q. Could we force 'shared use' parking into existing RPZs?

A. This would be possible, but it would require the promotion of a Traffic Regulation Order in each case and extensive informal and formal consultation would be required. Officers felt that seeking to impose shared use parking retrospectively would generate significant disquiet among residents of those RPZs.

Andrew Pulham reminded Members of an external report commissioned in 2017 which looked at the potential for Bishop's Stortford RPZs to accommodate 'outsider' parking on a managed basis with no detriment to residents. The report has identified that around 200 vehicles might be accommodated within existing RPZs on this basis.

The above report had been used as a basis for the introduction of permit parking in the 'Chantry' (B7) RPZ in Bishop's Stortford. Up to forty four permits had been put on offer to town centre workers; however only around fourteen have been purchased.

Members suggested the following to hopefully increase take-up of these permits in the 'Chantry' RPZ – and in any other RPZ where a similar shared use approach was adopted.

- Expand the geographical area of eligibility.
- Allow more flexible payment terms – e.g. monthly/quarterly payments, possibly by Standing Order.
- Better publicise the scheme and its advantages (i.e. lower cost than off-street car park charges)
- Consider allowing parking on Saturdays as well as Mondays-Fridays to maximise the appeal of the permits.

Members agreed that the 'Chantry' RPZ aside, residents in existing RPZs should NOT be asked to accept the retrospective implementation of 'outsider' parking in their scheme area.

Q. Can RPZs be better designed in other ways to ensure their maximum effectiveness?

A. This might be possible, but it would be immensely difficult to reflect such granularity of design in the legal document underpinning all such schemes – the Traffic Regulation Order.

4. Resident Survey on RPZ Policy

Laura Pollard took Members through the results of an online survey of East Herts residents, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting. Whilst analysis of the approx. 1,000 responses would be further developed in time for the report to O&S on 10 December, an initial analysis demonstrated majority support for RPZs among residents who currently live within a scheme area and a strong desire among residents in Bishop's Stortford and Hertford who do *not* live in a scheme area to be offered one.

5. Discussion on RPZ Policy

In addition to discussions minuted above, Members noted there were no responses from smaller towns such as Stanstead Abbots and Watton at Stone. Whilst neither town has an RPZ at present, it was suggested that in view of the perceived problems discussed earlier, it might be useful to solicit the views of local residents, perhaps via their elected representatives. It was agreed that the schedule of meetings would be expanded to permit residents of these towns to attend and contribute to the debate if they wished.

6. Any Other Business

As a response to an observation made earlier in the meeting, Sally Andrews advised Members of work currently underway with officer colleagues and the Portfolio Holder, looking at fees and charges proposals for 2020/21. These discussions are wide ranging and cover many aspects of on-street and off-street parking provision and charging.

Members of the T&F Group expressed a strong desire to be kept abreast of these developments and to be permitted engagement in the process in view of the work the Group is also doing to examine aspects of parking policy in the district, where there is a clear crossover into fees and charges considerations currently being discussed with the Portfolio Holder.

The possibility of 'Park and Ride' forming part of the solution in Bishop's Stortford was discussed during the meeting. It was suggested that this would not be viable on financial and logistical bases – even in the district's biggest town. Finding suitable parking land on the fringe of the town main off the main vehicular access routes would be difficult, the narrow roads would make it almost impossible to create bus priority lanes and to work properly the 'carrot' of a well functioning P&R scheme would have to be augmented by a 'stick' of dis-incentivising parking in the town centre by means such as reducing supply and significantly increasing prices. In summary, it was accepted that P&R is suited to historic towns and cities with a strong tourist 'pull' such as Cambridge, Oxford and Winchester, but would not currently be a viable option for any town in East Herts.

7. Date and Time of Next Meetings

As a consequence of decisions taken earlier in the meeting a revised meetings schedule was agreed as follows:

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| 15/10/19 | Second session on RPZ Policy and Operational Guidance |
| 13/11/19 | Combined session: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Climate change and sustainability aspects of parking policy• Invitation to S Abbots and Watton at Stone to present their local concerns. |
| 19/11/19 | 'Wrap up' meeting prior to preparation of a final report to O&S Committee on 10 December. |