

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 5 NOVEMBER 2019

REPORT BY COUNCILLOR HOLLY DRAKE, CHAIR OF THE PARKING
TASK AND FINISH GROUP

INTERIM REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE PARKING TASK AND FINISH
GROUP

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- To provide an interim report on the work of a Member Task and Finish Group looking into aspects of parking policy in East Herts.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:

That:

(A)	The Committee review the work undertaken thus far by the Task & Finish Group and the remaining stages of the Group's work which will culminate in a final report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 December 2019.
(B)	Members' views be sought on the progress so far.

1.0 Background

1.1 On 11 June 2019 the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee elected to examine aspects of East Herts Council's parking policies as part of its 2019/20 work programme.

1.2 A Member Task and Finish Group has been established to undertake this review. The Group is composed of:

- Councillor Holly Drake (Chair)
- Councillor John Wylie

- Councillor Sophie Bell
- Councillor Mari Stevenson
- Councillor Ian Devonshire

Ben Wood is the Council's lead officer for this policy review and Andrew Pulham, former Parking Manager at East Herts Council has been employed on a part time, fixed term basis to support the work of the Group.

1.3 The terms of reference as agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were to review the following policy areas:

- Town centre parking policy, focussing on Bishop's Stortford and Hertford
- Resident permit zone (RPZ) policy
- Parking standards within planning policy
- Climate change/sustainability aspects of parking policies

1.4 At its meeting on 23 July the Group agreed that due to time constraints the strand relating to East Herts planning policy would be deleted from the Group's agenda. As of 5 November the Group has addressed the first two items on the above list.

2.0 Report

Meeting One – Parking in Bishop's Stortford

2.1 The 23 July meeting focussed on parking in Bishop's Stortford. Members of the Bishop's Stortford Business Improvement District (BID) gave evidence on behalf of the town's business community.

2.2 Issues discussed included the Old River Lane and Goods Yard developments, problems associated with 'airport parking', commuter parking (specifically displacement caused by car park charges at the railway station), electric vehicle charging provision, new residential developments and the traffic management and sustainability aspects of the County

Council's Local Transport Plan (LTP4).

- 2.3 The Council's ability to use car park provision, designation and pricing to influence parking behaviours was noted. In connection with this the 2019 'AECOM' Bishop's Stortford Parking Strategy and Action Plan, jointly commissioned by EHDC and HCC was felt to offer a comprehensive analysis of the current situation in the town.
- 2.4 A shortage of off-street parking capacity was identified as a particular challenge for the town's workers and for the visitors on whom the town relies for much of its economic wellbeing. Options for reshaping current car park provision to help ameliorate this situation were discussed.
- 2.5 The Group concluded that different approaches are needed for different user cohorts. In respect of town centre employees the BID felt that a form of discounted, permit-based parking would be a good way to alleviate some of the financial pressures on local businesses.
- 2.6 The possibility of implementing a 'Free after Three' type offer in suitable car parks was discussed and it was noted that an initiative of this type is advocated in the BID's business plan. The Group offered *in principle* support for such a scheme, although it confirmed that modelling of the financial and other ramifications would first be required. It was agreed also that if implemented the initiative should operate initially as a trial to enable its impact to be assessed. The Group agreed that the BID should be asked to help underwrite the costs of such an initiative.
- 2.7 A full report on the findings and recommendations agreed by the Group in respect of parking in Bishop's Stortford will be presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 December; however the Group's main recommendations are as follows:

- i) Explore measures to encourage rail commuters to park in station car parks rather than Council-owned facilities on the basis that this will increase the availability of town centre parking spaces for town workers and shoppers.
- ii) Review the designation of Council car parks, placing most long stay provision at the edge of the town centre with charges set at a level that supports town centre workers in particular.
- iii) In parallel with (ii), improve the accessibility and availability of short stay parking in the town centre with the aim of promoting its economic wellbeing.
- iv) Consider the introduction of a permit scheme for employees of town centre businesses to incentivise them to park away from the town centre (through shared use of RPZs where possible).
- v) Better publicise the existing on-street business permit scheme in the 'Chantry' RPZ area and offer more flexible payment terms.
- vi) Review Blue Badge provision in car parks with a view to moving towards the 6% figure recommended by the DfT.
- vii) Consider whether Blue Badge motorists should be required to pay to park in EHDC car parks, on the basis that the Blue Badge scheme is concerned with accessibility, rather than the holder's ability to pay.

Meeting Two – Parking in Hertford

2.8 At its meeting on 22 August 2019 the Group discussed town centre parking in Hertford. Representatives from Hertford Town Council and the town's business community attended to give evidence. The meeting focussed on measures the Council could enact to support town centre businesses and their workers and to promote the daytime economy of the town.

2.9 There was a degree of overlap with the findings and recommendations from the 23 July session. For example, the

representatives from the Town Council and the business community agreed that a 'Free after Three' scheme might benefit the town, although it was suggested that an approach whereby a longer period of free parking is offered in the Council's car parks should also be considered. As with Bishop's Stortford it was suggested that outer car parks tend to be slightly less full and that a discounted permit scheme for businesses could be a way of incentivising their use as well as alleviating financial pressures on businesses.

- 2.10 Particular attention was focused on the perceived lack of parking thought necessary to support a thriving town centre. The temporary loss of Bircherley Green car park as well as the building of new housing developments in and around the town centre was held to have impacted upon the available space for shoppers. It was also suggested that current taxi rank provision on Fore Street and Railway Street should be amended to create additional short stay parking spaces.
- 2.11 The Council's proposal to make its staff car park at Wallfields available to town centre workers at weekends was welcomed by the traders' representative and supported by the T&F Group.
- 2.12 There was a brief discussion regarding proposals to charge East Herts Council staff for use of EHDC car parks. This was previously recommended as an action to explore as part of a Sustainable Transport Task and Finish Group in 2017. The Group felt that this should be revisited in due course.
- 2.13 A full report on the findings and recommendations agreed by the Group in respect of parking in Hertford will be presented on 10 December; however the Group's main recommendations can be summarised as follows:
 - i) Improve the quality and quantity of directional signage to the town's car parks.
 - ii) Offer use of the Wallfields staff car park to town centre businesses on Saturdays and Sundays, free of charge.

- iii) Implement a permit parking scheme whereby town workers can park at a lower charge in lesser used, fringe car parks.
- iv) Review Blue Badge provision in car parks with a view to moving towards the 6% level recommended by the DfT.
- v) Consider whether Blue Badge motorists should be required to pay to park in EHDC car parks, on the basis that the Blue Badge scheme is concerned with accessibility, rather than the holder's ability to pay.

In respect of (i) the Group noted the possibility that, subject to the agreement of the grantor, the terms of an existing S106 contribution could be varied to fund this additional signage and requested that this opportunity be explored. In respect of (ii) the Group noted that if implemented in its simplest form this initiative could be implemented and operate at minimal cost to the Council.

Meeting Three – Resident Permit Zone Policy (1)

- 2.14 The Task and Finish Group next met on 24 September when the Council's policy on Resident Permit Zones (RPZs) was examined. East Herts Cllrs Kaye and Cutting attended as witnesses to discuss the parking situation in residential roads in Ware and Bishop's Stortford respectively and Sally Andrews, the Council's Interim Parking Manager also gave evidence.
- 2.15 Prior to this session the Council had undertaken a short online survey of residents living within and outside RPZ areas. One thousand responses had been received.
- 2.16 An analysis of the survey's findings will be offered in the report to Overview and Scrutiny on 10 December; however the key findings of this survey, as discussed on 24 September are:
 - A clear majority of respondents currently residing within an RPZ value the benefits it brings (Bishop's Stortford, Hertford and Ware).

- A significant majority of Hertford and Bishop's Stortford respondents not currently residing within an RPZ would like one (the situation is more evenly balanced in Ware).

2.17 In light of the survey findings and the representations from Cllrs Kaye and Cutting, the T&F Group identified RPZ Policy as an area where further examination was needed and scheduled a further session on this topic for 15 October.

Meeting Four – Resident Permit Zone Policy (2)

2.18 At the session of the T&F Group on 15 October, Members examined the Council's current RPZ Policy and Operational Guidance in greater detail.

2.19 A full report on the findings and recommendations agreed by the Group in respect of RPZ Policy and Operational Guidance will be presented on 10 December; however the Group's main recommendations can be summarised as follows:

- i) Review the current RPZ Policy and Operational Guidance, in part to create more favourable eligibility criteria and terms on which new schemes might be awarded and operate.
- ii) Require that as a pre-condition to the awarding of a scheme, its design maximises parking availability to non-resident motorists (e.g. town centre workers) on a managed basis where this can be achieved at little or no detriment to residents.
- iii) Require that the implications of a proposed RPZ for the wider parking and traffic management situation in the town be fully understood and appropriate mitigations agreed before that scheme is granted.
- iv) Require that scheme set-up costs are recouped over a defined number of years through the permit charge.
- v) As a quid pro quo for agreeing to (ii) above, the permit price for residents to be offset by the revenue generated from the sale of permits to non-residents.

Recommendations not directly related to the agreed review areas

2.20 The T&F Group made additional recommendations, not related to the agreed review areas, as follows:

- i) Ensure public transport services are commissioned and operational at the same time as major new residential developments are occupied, to encourage new residents to shift towards public transport use as a first choice.
- ii) Encourage the implementation of car clubs, ideally electric, alongside new residential developments plus the installation of additional electric vehicle charging points throughout the town.
- iii) The T&F Group Chair to 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
- iv) Residents to be encouraged to notify MAG of 'airport parking' problems and the Council to be encouraged to publicise the number and website as widely as possible (the airport have a facility to report this but it not everyone is aware of it).

Future Meetings

2.21 A meeting on 13 November will examine the climate change/sustainability implications of the Council's parking policies and representatives from Hertfordshire County Council together with East Herts' Environmental Sustainability Coordinator will give evidence at this meeting.

2.22 At the invitation of the Group representatives from areas outside of the larger towns will also attend on 13 November to discuss the parking situation in these towns.

2.23 The Group will meet for a final time on 19 November to draw together the strands of its inquiries and agree a prioritised set of findings and proposals for presentation to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 December.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

- Bishop's Stortford Parking Strategy (AECOM, May 2019)
- Hertford Parking Demand Study (Project Centre, March 2017)
- East Herts Council Resident Permit Parking Policy and Operational Guidance (two documents)

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