

EVENING & WEEKEND CAR PARKING TASK GROUP FINAL REPORT



March 2016



Bromsgrove
District Council
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MEMBERSHIP OF THE TASK GROUP



Councillor Karen May (Chairman)



Cllr Margaret Buxton



Cllr Malcolm Glass



Cllr Sean Shannon



Cllr Shirley Webb

SUPPORTING OFFICER DETAILS

Amanda Scarce – Democratic Services Officer
a.scarce@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk

Foreword from the Chairman

The Evening and Weekend Car Parking Task Group, established on 30th September 2015, has held fifteen meetings at which they have interviewed both internal and external witnesses; in addition to this, Members of the Task Group have attended a Town Team Meeting and visited fifty one retail Outlets in the Town Centre.

I would like to formally thank everyone that has participated in this process; your input has been highly valued. I also extend my thanks to Councillors Margaret Buxton, Malcolm Glass, Sean Shannon and Shirley Webb for their hard work and commitment to this Task Group.

I would like to express special thanks to Amanda Scarce, Democratic Services Officer, for her administrative support and efficiency throughout the Task Group's investigations and Jess Bayley for her administrative support.

I hope that the information provided and the recommendations made will enable the Cabinet to develop a clear strategy for Car Parking in Bromsgrove that aids the Economic development of our Town.

Councillor Karen May
Chairman of the Evening & Weekend Car Parking Task Group

Summary of Recommendations

After consideration of the evidence available and interviewing witnesses the Task Group have proposed the following recommendations, supporting evidence can be found under the relevant chapters within the main body of this report.

Chapter 1

Recommendation 1

The Council needs to formulate a clear Economic Development strategy that includes car parking as soon as possible, whilst considering the following key features of any such strategy:

- a) Ensuring that car parking arrangements are managed in accordance with the interests of the local economy.*
- b) Working with partners in business and retail to develop the Economic Development Strategy that includes car parking options and tariffs that encourage customers to visit Bromsgrove.*
- c) Ensure car parking arrangements support the Council's Economic Development Strategy.*

Recommendation 2

Having formulated the Economic Development Strategy it is recommended that an external expert be engaged by the Council, with a clear remit of what the Council wishes to achieve, it is suggested that such a consultant would need to consult with the following Council officers/Members:

- a) Economic Development Team*
- b) Environmental Services Team*
- c) Relevant Portfolio Holders*
- d) Members of the Evening and Weekend Car Parking Task Group*
- e) Local businesses and retailers.*

Financial Implications for recommendations 1 & 2:

Cost of external consultant, together with any costs (currently unquantifiable) dependent upon the implementation of a strategy.

Legal Implications for recommendations 1& 2:

None - save that any changes to the operation of Council run car parks resulting from this recommendation would be likely to require the Car Parking Order to be updated.

Resource Implications 1 & 2:

Support from the Economic Development Unit and Wychavon District Council who administer the Council's car parks.

Chapter 2

Recommendation 3
<i>Prior to any further trials (of any nature) being agreed and carried out any necessary data should be collected in order to have appropriate comparative data and information available to ensure that any such trial can be measured successfully.</i>
Financial Implications: None
Legal Implications: None
Resource Implications: Any additional resources would be met from within existing resources/officer time.

Chapter 4

Recommendation 4
<i>Until the introduction of a strategy the current parking charges and concessions should be maintained (including the continuation of free evening car parking).</i>
Financial Implications: The estimated cost of free evening car park is £60k and this amount has already been accounted for within the budget process for the forthcoming year.
Legal Implications: None, although Members should note that the first 12 months of free evening parking arose from a Member decision to implement this as a “trial”. On the basis that the arrangement was a “trial” the car parking order was not amended to remove evening fees. A member decision to extend the trial would provide clarity as regards the car parking order.
Resource Implications: Any additional resources would be met from within existing resources/officer time.

Background Information

At its meeting held on 24th August 2015 the Overview and Scrutiny Board considered a topic proposal entitled Review of Evening Car Parking which had been submitted by Councillors Karen May and Luke Mallett, the aim of investigation was to assist officers in evaluating the success of the trial of free evening car parking which had been implemented in February 2015, with the possibility of recommendations being made for future car parking arrangements.

During discussions at that meeting Members were advised that a Task Group review of evening car parking would investigate use of the car parks during the evenings and the impact that this had had on the night time economy. It was envisaged that Members would consult with both local businesses and residents to ascertain the impact that free parking had had on the local economy and whether this free parking provision represented value for money for local tax payers. A review would also explore the potential for alternative parking arrangements to be introduced in the town. Following discussion the Board agreed that a Task Group review of this subject would provide information which could help the Cabinet when reviewing the outcomes of the trial and it was on this basis that Members agreed that the Task Group should be launched. It was also agreed that a report would be brought back to the Board in January 2016 before being presented to the Cabinet at its February 2016 meeting, which would be in time for the final budget setting process to be completed.

Currently, the Council has 1,238 car parking spaces (plus 81 disabled spaces), available with various types of payment methods and systems. The Task Group concentrated its investigations on the pay and display car parks within the Town Centre, where the free evening car parking after 7.00 pm was applied.

The Task Group held its first meeting on 30th September when it discussed how best to carry out its investigations. A number of key witnesses were identified together with data which was requested from the appropriate sources. It quickly became apparent from the work already carried out at the early stages of the investigations that an assessment of the success of the introduction of the free evening car parking was difficult to measure and any recommendations would have to be based on assumptions and anecdotal evidence.

This led the Members of the Group to unanimously agree that car parking as a whole needed to be reviewed in order to widen the area of benefit to residents and contribute to economic growth for the local traders and the district as a whole. The Task Group was mindful that part of the regeneration of the Town Centre will impact on car parking provision and believe that it would be prudent to undertake a full review at this time in order to ensure

that going forward the Council's car parks meet the needs of both visitors to the Town Centre and the traders.

The Task Group therefore requested, at the Overview & Scrutiny Board meeting on 23rd November, an amendment to its terms of reference together with an extension of the time to complete its work. Following discussion the Board agreed to amend the Task Group's remit to cover Evening and Weekend Car Parking and to extend its timescale for completion to March 2016, with an interim report being produced in January 2016.

This report follows on from that interim report and contains the Group's recommendations together with supporting evidence and areas which the Group would like to be noted for consideration in the future.

The Group have held 15 meetings where they have interviewed both internal and external witnesses. They have also been provided with a vast amount of data, including comparative data from other local authorities, which they have considered during a number of meetings.

Chapter 1

What is the Council's Strategic Approach to its Car Parks?

At an early stage of its investigation the Task Group asked the question what was the Council's strategic approach to its car parks. From all those witnesses interviewed, who were also asked this question, there was no definitive answer. It therefore quickly became clear to the Task Group that this was something which needed to be addressed in order for the Council to move forward in a number of areas. The Task Group all agreed that there were two elements to the purpose of car parks within Bromsgrove – an income stream, which was important in the current financial climate and when difficult decisions needed to be made following the continued budget cuts all local authorities received from Central Government, but also there was an opportunity for car parks to play a part in the economic development of the Town Centre.

It was these two areas which the Task Group concentrated on during its investigation and whilst questioning a number of witnesses. Each witness was asked what they felt was the role of car parks and what they believed was the Council's strategic approach to car parking. The Task Group received a unanimous response which clearly showed that there was not a strategic approach and that this was something which needed to be addressed. From those discussions with Officers and Portfolio Holders in particular, the Task Group have concluded that a strategy needs to be put in place which supports both the economic development of the town centre, but also continues to provide the Council with a source of income, although it should be noted that this may not be at the current level.

Once the Task Group had recognised the need for a strategy it considered a number of strategies which were already in place at other local authorities. The 2 main ones considered were Lichfield and Stafford, second and twelfth in the list of the Council's "nearest neighbours" (from the CIPFA website who provide performance information for public services) which are selected based on a number of indicators including population, output area density, tax-base per head of population and retail premises per 1,000 population to name but a few. Lichfield was particularly useful as it was in draft form and had recently been considered by its Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Each strategy had key features which ranged from achieving an overall reduction in traffic level to reinforcing business and visitor confidence.

The Task Group also considered a document entitled "Re-Think! Parking on the High Street". This had been prepared by the Association of Town and City Management in conjunction with a number of other organisations including the British Parking Association, which covered a number of key areas including whether there was a link between town centre prosperity and car parking provision. This particular section of the report highlighted a number of areas which could influence the success of a town centre. With reference to car parking, it also highlighted the importance of robust data

being available. This is an area which the Task Group have made particular reference to in the Chapter 2 of this report as it came up against significant problems in being provided with accurate information in respect of both financial and usage data.

From the information obtained during the Task Group's investigation it is clear that the formulation of a Car Parking Strategy needs to be given careful consideration to ensure that the document provides both clear guidance as to the purpose of the car parks and meets the needs of the Council. In order for this to be done the Task Group have detailed in recommendation 1 the main areas which it believes this strategy should cover. This is not a definitive list and is something which the Cabinet would need to give careful consideration to before taking this forward. With the passage of time it is likely that those key priorities will need to be reviewed and the Task Group discussed other areas which could be included, for example encouraging the use of sustainable transport, infrastructure improvements and addressing the adverse effects of car pollution on the environment (it has been documented in previous Task Group investigations that Bromsgrove has four Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs).

Recommendation 2 suggests that the use of an external consultant may be the most appropriate way forward, as the link between car parking and the economic development of a town centre is a complicated, specialist area. This would also ensure that the strategy it produced was based on sound supportive evidence. However, the recommendation comes with a caveat as it is important that when engaging consultants the Council gives a clear steer as to the purpose of the work it wishes the consultants to carry out and what it wishes to achieve. The inclusion of a number of people that should be consulted is again not exhaustive but merely a steer towards the areas which need to be included. The suggestion that the Task Group Members should be consulted is due to the amount of work they have carried out during this investigation and the substantial amount of knowledge which has been gained.

In the last few months Cabinet have already considered two reports in respect of the town centre, the first was in respect of the Council's future economic priorities and the Task Group agreed that to some extent car parking could help support a number of these. The second report which was considered in November 2015 was in respect of Bromsgrove centres management and the involvement of the North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration (NWEDR) in hosting a new Bromsgrove Centres Management function on behalf of the Council that would cover the Town Centre and outlying centres and villages. This included the appointment of a Town Centre Manager. The Task Group believe this role will be pivotal in taking forward the economic development of the Town Centre and the Council's priorities for it, with the support of the Car parking Team.

Finally, and probably one of the most important areas which has come to the attention of the Task Group is that there needs to be co-ordination and "joined up" thinking between the Car Parking Team and the Economic Development

Team. It is essential that the two teams work together in order for the car parks to be fit for purpose going forward. There are a significant number of changes which will take place over the coming months and years which will impact on the number of car parking spaces within the town centre and it is important that the Council ensures that the quality of spaces and the cost of parking meet the needs of an ever changing town centre and assists with the growth of its economic development.

The Task Group therefore recommends the following:

Recommendation 1

The Council needs to formulate a clear Economic Development strategy that includes car parking as soon as possible, whilst considering the following key features of any such strategy:

- a) Ensuring that car parking arrangements are managed in accordance with the interests of the local economy.*
- b) Working with partners in business and retail to develop the Economic Development Strategy that includes car parking options and tariffs that encourage customers to visit Bromsgrove.*
- c) Ensure car parking arrangements support the Council's Economic Development Strategy.*

Recommendation 2

Whilst formulating such a strategy it is recommended that an external expert be engaged by the Council, with a clear remit of what the Council wishes to achieve, it is suggested that such a consultant would need to consult with the following Council officers/Members:

- a) Economic Development Team*
- b) Environmental Services Team*
- c) Relevant Portfolio Holders*
- d) Members of the Evening and Weekend Car Parking Task Group*
- e) Local businesses and retailers.*

Chapter 2

Financial Information and Usage Data

Whilst this Chapter appears to be relatively short, the information provided in it is vitally important moving forward.

The Task Group received information from a number of officers and Portfolio Holders and was clear in the information, both financial and statistically, which it would need in order to be able to evaluate whether the free evening car parking had been a success and more importantly, be able to establish whether it had been value for money. Unfortunately, it soon became clear that it would be nigh on impossible to establish either of these critical points. From the information received it was clear that the introduction of the free evening car parking had been taken prior to any work being carried out which would enable it to be monitored or its success measured. The difficulty in monitoring it had been highlighted in the Cabinet report and officers had attempted in the following months to gauge whether there was increased use of car parking simply by asking the parking enforcement officers to count the number of vehicles at a set team one evening a week. The Task Group received these figures, but do not believe that this data is sufficient to measure the success of the scheme.

The Task Group believe that it would have been possible to calculate the number of vehicles which had used the car parks for free after 7 p.m. if the machines had been calibrated to produce a ticket when no fee had been charged. This would have gone some way to producing some solid evidence that would have shown, if compared to the previous year's ticket sales, whether the car park usage had increased.

Furthermore, the ticket machines currently used are of an age (some five years old) where the Council may wish to consider replacing them, this was highlighted during the recent move of the Council's IT server, as since September 2015 there has been ongoing problems with the linkage of software to that server. Due to the age of the machines, the manufacturers will no longer support them with a maintenance agreement, which has possibly led to the problems continuing to be unresolved when the Task Group last meet with officers in early February 2016. Without these added problems, the extraction of data remains a lengthy process, following changes which the Council put in place a number of years ago. This was following a number of complaints from residents about the machines not giving change; the machines were configured to add on a time credit in 10 minute blocks. To clarify, you therefore need to run the appropriate programme at 10 minute intervals over the period you wish to measure, in order to extrapolate specific data. This is a lengthy and time consuming process.

The Task Group have received data in respect of the financial impact to the Council, this has also been conflicting and the Task Group does not feel that it is able to use it as evidence within its report as it remains uncertain as to the

exact cost to the Council. It is hoped that this will become clear at the end of the financial year, but the Task Group wish to highlight that this should not be the case and accurate information should be available for any particular area throughout the financial year.

Following its findings, the Task Group therefore strongly believe that any future trials that the Council undertake, should not be put in place until the appropriate data is available to allow for comparative data from previous years to be used and a mechanism put in place to allow the trial to be monitored as part of the ongoing process.

The Task Group therefore recommends the following:

Recommendation 3

<i>Prior to any further trials (of any nature) being agreed and carried out any necessary data should be collected in order to have appropriate comparative data and information available to ensure that any such trial can be measured successfully.</i>
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Chapter 3

Summary of Consultations

At its first meeting the Task Group agreed that it was important to get feedback from both residents and traders in an attempt to gauge whether the introduction of free evening car parking had been a success. Initially a press release was issued, followed by an online questionnaire; there were two versions of this, one for residents and one for traders to complete. This was publicised through the Council's website and the Together Bromsgrove magazine, with a further press release being issued. However, when checking the local press it was found that a survey was also being carried out by the Bromsgrove High Street Forum. Members were not aware of this group and therefore made enquiries and invited a representative to a meeting to discuss their work and the aim of the questionnaire.

The Task Group also contacted and interviewed representatives from the Older People's Forum as they had in the past put forward topic proposals in respect of car parking on a number of occasions and had a keen interest in the topic. During the discussions a number of valid points were raised and given further consideration during the course of the Task Group's investigation.

The Task Group also made contact with the Town Team, a group of traders who met on a regular basis. Following a number of unsuccessful attempts to get a member of this group to attend a Task Group meeting, the Task Group attended a meeting of the Town Team in the Asda meeting rooms. This meeting was also attended by the Portfolio Holder for the Town Centre, who regularly met with the traders. The Task Group were disappointed with the number of traders who were in attendance at the particular meeting they attended and with the limited responses which were received from traders to its questionnaire. This led the Task Group to take to the streets and visit a number of traders to get their views on car parking and whether the free evening car parking had had a positive impact on trade.

This gave a total of three surveys (with a total number of responses from both traders and residents of 641) which were undertaken and the full results of each are details at Appendix 4. However, the Task Group would like to make the following observations:

Results from the Task Group's Online Consultation

The Task Group were disappointed with the number of responses it received to this, particular from the local traders, but felt that this may have been due to the issue of the High Street Forum's survey, which had received considerable more publicity through both the press and a Facebook page the Forum uses. However it was interesting to see from the results that 71.26% of those residents who responded said that free evening car parking had brought them into the town centre more often. In respect of one of the subsidiary questions

it was noted bringing this forward to 6.00 p.m. would have been more popular. From its investigations of other authorities which provided free evening car parking, it was noted that in all cases free car parking commenced at 6.00 p.m. The introduction of a contactless payment system was also something which residents had highlighted and this will be discussed in more detail within the Charges and Concessions section of the report.

Traders felt the free evening car parking had little impact on them as it was mainly retail traders who had responded and it did not affect them. When asked about the option of free or concessionary Sunday car parking and whether this would encourage them to open the response was that people did not shop on a Sunday as there were few shops open and a 7 day trading week was not possible for small businesses.

Results from Members Sample Survey of Shops

Members visited 51 traders from a number of different retail types, with nearly 30% of them being open on a Sunday. The two most interesting results from this survey were that just over 92% of those traders visited were not aware of free evening car parking and that some sort of concessionary car parking on a Sunday would not entice nearly 53% of them to consider opening on a Sunday.

Analysis of the data received from the Bromsgrove High Street Forum's Online Survey

The Bromsgrove High Street Forum's survey received over 470 responses and the Task Group thank them for both their time in attending a meeting and providing the results for use within this report.

The survey contained 11 questions in total and the Task Group have used 8 in particular, which it felt most reflected the work it was carrying out. The questions provided multiple choice responses, which although useful the Task Group felt in some cases were particularly leading, for example when asked "what do you think about the cost of parking in Bromsgrove" one option was "it's too expensive" and not surprisingly over 65% felt that this was the case. It should be noted that the responses to questions 2 and 3 (see appendix 3) have also been grouped in line with the Task Group's questionnaire responses, so may be slightly different to those published by the Bromsgrove High Street Forum.

Again, the Task Group was both surprised and disappointed to see that nearly 41% of those responding were not aware of the availability of free evening car parking. A further point which was highlighted in this survey, and which will be discussed in more detail under the Charges and Concessions section of this report, was the use of contactless payment for car parking, which nearly 56% of respondents were interested in using.

A number of the points raised from all these survey results will be discussed in more detail in the conclusion of this report which suggests areas that the Council may wish to give consideration to when making any decisions in respect of car parking in the future.

Chapter 4

Charges and Concessions

Charges and concessions were considered in detail by the Task Group. Information was obtained from the Environmental Services Team and the Task Group spoke to the Portfolio Holders for Finance, Environmental Services and the Economic Development, in order to get their views on this and a number of other issues which have been discussed in earlier in this report.

The Task Group also received comparative data which officers had prepared once again using the Council's Nearest Neighbours list. This allowed it to see charging policies from a wider variety of local authorities and to compare them with those made by the Council.

Free evening car parking was something which was available at a number of other authorities, however it was noted that in the majority of cases this commenced at 6.00 p.m. rather than the 7.00 p.m. start time chosen by the Council. If free evening car parking was not available then authorities often took the option of making a nominal charge of £1 for the whole evening again, taking effect from 6.00 p.m.

The Task Group also considered the option of either free or a concessionary charge for Sunday parking as this again, was something which a large number of other authorities provided, often charging £1 for all day Sunday parking. This was something which Members of the Task Group discussed when visiting traders and asked whether this would encourage them to open on a Sunday, as Members believed that the Council need to work together with the traders and get a commitment from them to support such a move. As detailed in the survey results, this was not particularly supported by the traders and the Task Group understood that many smaller businesses would need to see an increase in the footfall in the town centre before making such a commitment, however the footfall would not increase merely by reducing the car parking charges, as the residents would need to see a wider variety of shops open before they would come into the town centre. This is something which needs to be considered in more detail moving forward and which will be discussed in further detail within the conclusion to this report.

The finally two areas which Members considered in respect of charges and concessions were actually how residents paid for parking. It was clear from the survey results that pay on foot was a popular form of car parking. The Council currently has one car park which uses this form of parking and is controlled by a barrier system. Previous car parking task groups have suggested that pay on foot was the way forward and have made specific recommendations around this. Those recommendations have previously been turned down by Cabinet, stating that the other car parks are not suitable for this type of car park. However, the Task Group have now been made aware that with the use of new technology this form of car parking no longer

needs to be enclosed and controlled by a barrier. It can be controlled by the use of registration recognition cameras or for example a system called “check in check out” where the user must insert a credit or debit card in order to obtain a ticket and on return, the ticket is re-inserted and the appropriate charge made against that credit/debit card.

The Task Group were also aware that from the survey results and in respect of pay and display car parks, users were keen to be able to “top up” their car parking when out and about by phone or indeed simply pay for parking by phone. It was understood that this system was currently being trialled by Wychavon District Council who administer the Council’s car parks and Members were keen for this to be taken forward if at all possible.

In light of the survey results, and in respect of the high percentage of people who had not even been aware of the introduction of free evening car parking, the Task Group feel that any future changes made needed to be communicated in a more thorough manner in order for residents to benefit from any concessions which may be on offer. At the present time the Task Group do not think it would be appropriate for any further changes to be made to the car parking charges and concession, until a car parking strategy has been put in place, nor would it be appropriate to remove the concession of free evening car parking, as that strategy may suggest that further changes be made.

When the strategy is in place (as recommended in Chapter 1, then the Council may wish to think about whether its charges should stay the same, increase or decrease. During its investigations the Task Group has considered a number of options which the Council may wish to look at in more detail:

- If the charges are increased then consideration could be given to the instruction of a free half hour slot, which was something highlighted within the surveys carried out.
- The re-introduction of free parking for the disabled or free parking for a set time such as 2 hours (this was something which was available at a number of other authorities).
- Re-consider the pricing structure for annual parking passes and make a significant reduction in order to make it a realistic option for those using the town centre on a daily basis.

The Task Group is therefore making the following recommendation:

Recommendation 4

<i>Until the introduction of a strategy the current parking charges and concessions should be maintained (including the continuation of free evening car parking).</i>
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Chapter 5

Observations and Conclusion

The overarching conclusion of the Task Group is that there is no way of establishing whether the introduction of free car parking after 7.00 p.m. has been a success and therefore the Council needs to formulate a car parking strategy prior to it making any further changes to the current car parking arrangements, this includes leaving in place the concession of free evening car parking after 7.00 p.m.

The question could also be asked as to what the Council's objective was from introducing free evening car parking.

The Task Group would also like to highlight the following observations which the Cabinet may wish to consider when making future decisions in respect of car parking in the future:

Potential Loss of Parking Spaces

With the current re-development of sites in the town centre underway, there was the potential that over 130 of the Council's 1,319 car parking spaces would be lost in the near future. Whilst the impact from this may not be substantial at the moment, the Council should be mindful that as the town centre redevelopments bring improvement to the town centre then the footfall will also hopefully gather momentum. That increase could potentially bring about the situation where the Council does not have sufficient car parking spaces to meet the needs of an ever growing town centre.

The Task Group would therefore suggest that this is something which the newly appointed Town Centre Manager may wish to investigate further in order to establish basic baseline information as a starting point, as detailed in Chapter 1 of this report. The implications of this would not only impact on the availability of car parking spaces but on potential income for the Council.

Car Parks and Ticket Machines

From the responses received to all the surveys carried out the Task Group noted a number of comments in respect of lighting around the car parks and the machines themselves.

It is likely that sometime in the not too distant future the ticket machines will need to be replaced. Consideration of replacing the machines, should not take place until the car park strategy as highlighted in Chapter 1 is in place. The investment in new machines should not be taken lightly and should include consideration being given to whether the ticket machines are disabled friendly. Anecdotally, Members were aware that the current machines were at a height which made it difficult for wheelchair users to access them without the aid of a passer-by. It may also be useful to consider the location of any

disabled parking spaces within the Council's car parks to ensure that they are appropriately placed for easy access to the ticket machines in future.

The Task Group also noted from the survey responses that the lighting around some of the machines was not particularly good and that this was something which the Council may wish to consider reviewing when replacing the ticket machines.

Changes to Car Parking Charges and Concessions

As previously highlighted in the main body of this report the Task Group were surprised to see that nearly 41% of those who responded to the survey were not aware of the trial for free evening car parking. The Task Group would therefore strongly suggest that any future changes/trials for car parking are clearly communicated to residents in as many ways as possible to ensure maximum coverage. This should include for example wider press releases as the Task Group were aware that some of the outlying parts of the District are not covered by the local free papers and also communicating through the Parish Councils (noticeboards for Parish Councils' are an old fashioned but good way of communicating). It was commented that communicating through parishes may also bring in residents from the outlying areas, who may not otherwise visited the town centre on a regular basis.



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TOPIC PROPOSAL

This form can be used for either a Task Group or a Short Sharp Review topic proposal.

Completed forms should be returned to scrutiny@bromsgrove.gov.uk – Democratic Services, Bromsgrove District Council.

Name of Proposer: Councillors Luke Mallett & Karen May	
Tel No:	Email: l.mallett@bromsgrove.gov.uk k.may@bromsgrove.gov.uk
Date: 07/08/15	

<p>Title of Proposed Topic (including specific subject areas to be investigate)</p>	<p>Review of Evening Car Parking</p>
<p>Background to the Proposal (Including reasons why this topic should be investigated and evidence to support the need for the investigation.)</p>	<p>A report was presented to Cabinet on 7th January 2015 which covered a twelve month trial of Pay and Display Car Parks within Bromsgrove being offered free parking from 7 pm each evening. The trial was put in place from February 2015 to February 2016.</p> <p>The Overview & Scrutiny Board have done a number of investigations over the years in respect of various aspects of car parking in the district and has a wealth of knowledge on the subject.</p> <p>The investigation would assist officers in evaluating the success of the trial together with any possible recommendations for future car parking arrangements.</p>

<p>Links to national, regional and local priorities</p> <p>(including the Council's strategic purposes)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide good things for me to see, do and visit. • Help me run a successful business 			
<p>Possible Key Objectives</p> <p>(these should be SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has free parking during the evening made a difference to the night time economy? If so, to what extent. • Does the free parking offer value for money to the public? • What alternative options are available and how do these compare to free evening parking for both the customer and the traders in Bromsgrove. 			
<p>Anticipated Timescale for completion of the work.</p>	<p>4 – 6 months with the final report being presented to Cabinet in February 2016.</p>			
<p>Would it be appropriate to hold a Short Sharp Inquiry or a Task Group? (please tick relevant box)</p>	<p>Task Group</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Short Sharp Inquiry</p>	

Declarations of Interest

It was agreed by Members at the initial meeting of the Task Group that a general declaration would be included within the report advising that all Members used the Council's car park facilities from time to time.

WORK PROGRAMME

Date of Meeting	Subject
30/09/15	Discuss terms of reference and agree future meetings dates and expertise witnesses.
19/10/15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview with Kevin Hirons & Martin Ashcroft. • Press release • Questionnaire for residents & traders together with distribution ideas.
28/10/15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview representative from Older People’s Forum (Carol Tipping & Charlie Bateman) • Interview representative from Town Centre Group
16/11/15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further discussions with Kevin Hirons and Martin Ashcroft • Interview with representative from Town Centre Group • Responses from press release/ Questionnaire. • Review Terms of Reference and Scoping Document.
30/11/15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview with Cllr G Denaro
02/12/15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview with Representative from the Bromsgrove High Street Improvement Forum (Residents’ Group) • Responses to Questionnaires • Review of Terms of Reference • Consider any further work needed
16/12/15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview with Cllr Peter Whittaker • Draft Recommendations and/or areas to be included within the interim report

04/01/16	Review interim report prior to inclusion on Overview & Scrutiny Board agenda.
14/01/16 Asda Meeting Room 5.30 pm	Town Team Meeting – Members invited to attend. Followed by de-brief at Parkside Committee Room.
18/01/16 (Overview & Scrutiny Board)	<i>Draft Interim Report to be presented to Overview & Scrutiny Board.</i>
25/01/16	Jayne Pickering – Executive Director, Finance and Resources
26/01/16	Councillor Rita Dent – Economic Development
10/02/16	Survey of High Street Shops
11/02/16	Guy Revans – Head of Environmental Services Kevin Hirons – Environmental Services Manager
18/02/16	Review of evidence and areas to be covered by final report
23/02/16	Interview with Dean Piper – Head of Economic Development & Regeneration - North Worcs
03/03/16	Discussion – Final report and recommendations.
21/03/16	<i>Final Draft Report and recommendations presented to Overview & Scrutiny Board.</i>
23/03/16	<i>Final Report considered by Leaders Group</i>
06/04/16	<i>Final Report considered by Cabinet</i>

RESULTS FROM THE ONLINE CONSULTATION

The online questionnaires were available from early November 2015 to 15th January 2016 and split into 2 categories. These could be accessed through the Council’s website and was initially featured on the main page. The consultation was also promoted through the Together Bromsgrove Magazine which was distributed to residents in early November, with a press release also being issued.

87 responses were received from Residents either by email or post.

Question 1 – Have you made use of the free car parking and if so, on what days?

No	Various	Weekend	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
16	37	24	5	2	3
18.39%	42.53%	27.59%	5.75%	2.30%	3.45%

Question 2 - Has free evening car parking brought you in to the town centre more often?

Yes	No	Not Aware
62	23	2
71.26%	26.45%	2.30%

Questions 2a - If no, what would? (Top 6 responses)

- Better entertainment opportunities.
- Better if free evening car parking started from 5 or 6.00 pm.
- Free Sunday car parking.
- Better facilities and greater variety of shops.
- Offer free parking during special events in the town centre, such as Christmas markets/lights switch on.
- Free 30 mins/hour during the day e.g. between 9 and 10.00 am or first hour free.

Question 3 - What changes, if any, would you suggest to improve the car parking facilities within the Town Centre? (Top 6 Responses)

- Make all car parks pay on exit (Pay on Foot)
- Free evening after 6.00 pm.
- Make car parking free.
- Short term free parking e.g. 30 mins/hour.
- Free parking for disabled badge users.
- Pay by mobile

Question 4 – Which of the following do you think are best for car parks (Pay and Display, Pay on Foot, Free Evening, Free Sunday, No discount car parking but fees invested in better parking, Other)

All	Free Evening & Sunday	Free Evening	Free Sunday	Pay on Foot	Pay on Foot, Free Evening & Free Sunday	Pay & Display, Free Evening & Free Sunday	Other
3	21	3	2	6	39	11	2
3.45%	24.14%	3.45%	2.30%	6.90%	44.83%	12.64%	2.30%

Comments arising from Question 4 (Top 6 Responses)

- Parking permits for over 60s
 - Pay on foot
 - Flat fee or free Sunday car parking.
 - Free from 6.00 pm.
 - Free one hour parking during the day.
 - No charges at all.
-

5 responses received from Traders to the first online questionnaire

Question 1 - Have you noticed an increase in the footfall to your business since February 2015?

Yes	No
0	5

Question 2 - What do you think would encourage people to come into the Town Centre more?

- Free parking for 3 hours on certain days, so they have time to spend looking at the shops instead of rushing off before their ticket runs out. Rates lowered too many charity shops as they are the only ones that can afford the discounted rates they have to pay, not much choice in Bromsgrove, it could be amazing if the Council were more accountable.
- Option to top up car park through their phones
- Better variety of shops. Lights to come on earlier in winter months (as we type this its 4 pm getting dark and no lights are on). More obvious parking and pay at the end of parking.
- The quietest day of the week is usually a Wednesday afternoon. It would be great to have free parking for one afternoon a week when the shops are open!
- Free parking in the day not at night. More well known shops. A clean High Street. Regular interesting markets.

Question 3 - Are you open on a Sunday?

- If no – please provide details as to why not.
- What would encourage you to open on a Sunday?

Yes	No
1	4

- I have no problem opening Sunday but people will not shop in Bromsgrove when they can get free parking and more choice in other towns.
- Yes, but don't get much trade. Free parking on Sundays would massively help to increase trade and it would encourage other traders to open on Sundays.
- We are a business rather than a shop so we have no need to trade on a Sunday.
- We only open on a Sunday in December on the run up to Christmas. There would need to be a market on a Sunday for us to open up on a regular basis throughout the year.
- Because Bromsgrove is dead on a Sunday and a 7 day trading week is not possible we are a small business.

Question 4 - Which of the following options do you think are best for car park users (Pay and Display, Pay on Foot, Free Evening, Free Sunday, No discount car parking but fees invested in better parking, Other)

- Discounted or free on certain days or the first two/three hours free. When Bromsgrove do free days leading up to Christmas the town is buzzing.
- Pay on Foot and free Sunday parking.
- Pay of Foot car parks and free evening car parking.
- Pay and Display car parks.
- Free parking for the entire week and at least for 3 hours. Free parking in the evenings benefits the restaurants but the traders with normal working hours will not see an increase in footfall since the car parking is fully charged during our hours of opening.

RESULTS FROM MEMBERS' SAMPLE SURVEY

A total of 51 traders were visited

Types of Traders Visited	Charity Shops	6	11.76%
	Retail (Clothes/Shoes/phones)	14	27.45%
	Stationery/Cards	3	5.88%
	Commercial (bank, estate agent, recruitment, travel)	6	11.76%
	Commercial (computer, electrical, pawnbrokers)	6	11.76%
	Fast Food/Public Houses/Amusements	6	11.76%
	Hairdresser/chemist/optician	7	13.72%
	Grocery/Flowers	3	5.88%

Shops Open on a Sunday

High Street	Argos	
	Timpsons	Only during January/February
	Milletts	
	Red Lion	
	Card Factory	
	Shipleys Amusements	
	Burtens/Dorothy Perkins	
	M&Co	April to December
	Specsavers	
	Subway	
	Dominos	
Mill Lane	Iceland	
Market Street	Knights Chemist	
	Just for Pets	
The Strand	Queens Head	
	Strand Barbers	
	MidlandWaterlife	
15 opened regularly (17 in total)		29.41%

Has free evening car parking had an impact on trade for you?

No	47	92.16%
Not aware	3	5.88%
Yes	1	1.96%

Would you consider opening if there was some sort of Sunday car parking concession?

Yes	7	13.72%
No	27	52.94%
Already open	2	3.92%
Tried it	12	23.53%
Not sure	3	5.88%

ANALYSIS OF DATA RECEIVED FROM THE HIGH STREET FORUM'S ONLINE SURVEY

High Street Forum's online survey was carried out from September to December 2015 with 471 responses being analysed.

1 Which mode of transport do you prefer to use to travel to Bromsgrove town centre?		
Car	316	67.09%
Walk/Run	126	25.75%
Bicycle/Motorbike	6	1.27%
Public (Train, Taxi, Bus etc)	16	3.40%
Various (mix of above)	7	1.49%

2 Choose the main reason that you travel to Bromsgrove Town Centre		
Work	35	7.43%
Shopping Retail(including market)	169	35.88%
Food & Drink Daytime (inc Leisure Centre)	22	4.67%
Food & Drink Evening	48	10.19%
Window Shopping	135	28.66%
Various (incl Post Office, Bank, Health)	62	13.16%

3 When do you travel to Bromsgrove Town centre? (Tick as many as apply)		
Various	182	38.64%
Weekend	203	43.10%
Tuesday	7	1.47%
Wednesday	14	2.97%
Thursday	12	2.55%
All	53	11.25%

4 What do you think about the cost of parking in Bromsgrove?		
It's too expensive	307	65.18%
The cost is just right	37	7.85%
No Comment	15	3.18%
It depends on which car park you use and how long you want to stay	112	23.87%

5 What do you think about the ease of paying for parking in the town centre car parks (pay on foot)?		
It's easy	183	38.85%
It's ok but I often don't have change for the ticket machine	248	52.65%
It's difficult	25	5.31%
No Comment	15	3.18%

6 What do you think about the convenience of paying for car parking (pay and display)?		
It's easy	143	30.36%
It's ok but I often don't have change for the ticket machine	275	58.39%
it's difficult	40	8.49%
No Comment	13	2.76%

7 Have you benefited from free parking after 7pm on most town centre car parks?		
Yes - knew about free parking and took advantage of it	132	28.02%
No - I knew about, but didn't take advantage of it.	119	25.26%
I didn't know there was free parking after 7 pm	192	40.76%
No Comment	28	5.94%

8 Would you be interested in contact-less car parking payment (using your debit or credit card over a scanner in the car-park?)		
Yes	262	55.63%
No	204	43.31%
No comment	5	1.06%

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Task Group wishes to thank the Democratic Services Officer, Amanda Scarce for her support throughout the Task Group's investigations, together with the Environmental Services Manager, Kevin Hiron, who had provided data and supported the Task Group throughout its investigations.

The Task Group would also like to thank all those traders and residents who took the time to complete the online questionnaire.

WITNESSES

The Task Group considered evidence from the following sources before making its recommendations:

Internal Witnesses:

Kevin Hiron – Environmental Services Manager
Guy Revans – Head of Environmental Services
Jayne Pickering – Executive Director, Finance and Resources
Martin Ashcroft – Partnerships & Projects Manager
Dean Piper - Head of Economic Development & Regeneration - North Worcs

Councillors:

Councillor Geoff Denaro – Finance and Resources
Councillor Peter Whittaker – Environmental Services
Councillor Rita Dent – Economic Development

External Witnesses:

Representatives from the Older People's Forum
Representative from the Bromsgrove High Street Improvement Forum
Members of the Town Team.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Scrutiny Report – Car Parking	(March 2007)
Recreation Road South Car Park Task Group Final Report	(August 2011)
BDC Parking Review & Presentation	(December 2013)
BDC Parking Usage Review	(October 2014)
Car Parking Short Sharp Review	(January 2015)

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