

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

21ST MARCH 2016 AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors K.J. May (Vice-Chairman), C. Allen-Jones, S. J. Baxter, C. J. Bloore, B. T. Cooper, M. Glass, P.L. Thomas, M. Thompson and S. A. Webb

Observers: Councillor S. P. Shannon and Councillor M. A. Sherrey

Officers: Ms. J. Pickering, Mr. G. Revans, Ms. B. Houghton, Mr D. Rischmiller, Ms. J. Bayley and Ms. A. Scarce

MINUTE EXTRACT

118/15

EVENING & WEEKEND CAR PARKING TASK GROUP - FINAL REPORT

Councillor K. J. May, Chairman of the Evening and Weekend Car Parking Task Group, delivered a presentation outlining the findings of the review. During this presentation she highlighted the following matters for Members' consideration:

- The first scrutiny review of car parking had taken place in 2007. Since that date 10 further reviews of the subject had been undertaken.
- The group had interviewed a range of expert witnesses including 51 retailers, the Town Centre Forum, relevant Portfolio Holders and appropriate Officers.
- Members had discovered that 92 per cent of retailers were not aware that free evening car parking was available in the town.
- Car parking charges had often been regarded as a useful source of Council revenue.
- However, the group had come to the conclusion at an early stage that a key role of car parking was to contribute to the economic development of the town.
- For this reason at the end of 2015 the group had asked to extend their deadline to provide time to explore weekend parking options alongside evening car parking arrangements.
- Members had discovered that there was no joined up thinking in respect of car parking.
- The group was proposing that in order to address this and to enhance the contribution of car parking to economic development in the town the Council needed to formulate a clear economic development strategy.

- The witnesses consulted by the group were keen for a strategy to be developed and for partners to be engaged in the development of this plan.
- Whilst the strategy was being developed the group was suggesting that free evening car parking should be retained.

Following the presentation of the report Members discussed a number of points in detail:

- The contribution that external consultants could make in terms of identifying the long-term strategic parking needs of the town.
- The extent to which the Council could afford to pay external consultants and whether this could be met from existing budgets.
- The role of the Economic Development Unit in formulating a clear Economic Development Strategy. Officers advised that this work would be undertaken by Council staff rather than consultants.
- The potential loss of 130 car parking spaces in the town as a result of development work and the impact that this might have on the local economy.
- The costs of providing free evening car parking, with £60,000 per annum allocated in the budget for this purpose.
- The potential for further businesses to open on Sundays and the extent to which changes to car parking arrangements could incentivise more retailers to open on this day.
- The lack of sufficient data or a business case to enable Members to determine whether the free evening car parking trial had been value for money.
- The need for data to be gathered and a clear business case to be developed in advance of any future trials being undertaken.
- The fact that many local authorities had developed car parking and economic development strategies.
- The age of the car parking machines used by the Council and the need to replace these with machines that would have a longer lifespan.
- The potential to extend pay on foot arrangements as proposed during previous car parking reviews.
- The potential for the proposed Economic Development Strategy to help the Council to support the strategic purpose: help me to run a successful business.

Prior to the vote the Board discussed the order in which the first 2 recommendations detailed in the group's report should be implemented. There was general consensus that car parking arrangements needed to support the Economic Development Strategy for the town centre. Members therefore suggested that the external consultants should only be invited to review this role once the strategy had been finalised. For this reason the wording of recommendation 2 was altered to begin "Having formulated the Economic Development Strategy it is recommended that an external expert be engaged by the Council..."

RECOMMENDED that

- (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 parking options and tariffs that encourage customers to visit Bromsgrove; and
 - (c) Ensure car parking arrangements support the Council's Economic Development Strategy.

- (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
 - (d) Relevant Portfolio Holders
 - (e) Members of the Evening and Weekend Car Parking Task Group
 - (f) Local businesses and retailers.

- (3) 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.

- (4) Until the introduction of a strategy the current parking charges and concessions should be maintained (including the continuation of free evening car parking).

The meeting closed at 7.07 p.m.

Chairman