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**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the**

**PARKING TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

**Held on Thursday, 10 December 2009 at 2.00 pm in  
Anglia Room, Elizabeth House, Dereham**

**PRESENT**

Mrs S.M. Matthews (Chairman)	Mrs P. Quadling
Mr P.J. Duigan	Mr B. Rose
Mr K. Martin	Mrs P.A. Spencer
Mr D.G. Mortimer	

**Also Present**

Mr A.P. Joel

**In Attendance**

Mark Broughton	- Scrutiny Officer
Sheila Cresswell	- Member Services Officer

The Mayor of Attleborough and Town Clerk were also in attendance at this meeting, along with students from the UEA Business School.

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**25/09 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)**

Car Parking Enforcement Regimes (Minute No. 23/09 (b))

It was noted that with regard to the presentation from Swaffham Town Council, the funding for the salary of the part-time parking attendant came from Breckland District Council, with the Town Council only responsible for covering the hours worked as market supervisor.

Minutes

Subject to this amendment, the Minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2009 were confirmed as a correct record.

**26/09 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 2)**

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs D. Irving.

The Scrutiny Officer also gave apologies from Mr R. Wright (North Norfolk District Council) with regard to Agenda Item 5.

**27/09 ATTLEBOROUGH TOWN COUNCIL FEEDBACK (AGENDA ITEM 6)**

The Attleborough Town Clerk presented a verbal report outlining some of the comments and complaints which the Town Council had received about parking issues in the town.

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She explained that the Town Council had no jurisdiction over the public car parks, but had asked for local feedback in order to be able to give some informed views to Breckland District Council as part of the latter's Review of car parking across the district.

After a recent meeting, The Town Council had resolved to investigate charging for off-street parking between 06.00 and 18.00 (excluding Sundays and Public Holidays). It was proposed that the first two hours should be free, followed by a minimal charge for 2-4 hours, rising steeply thereafter for town centre slots. It was hoped that this could ensure a satisfactory turnover of parking spaces, especially in the town centre.

There was also concern about the relative lack of public transport which meant that an essential part of the community needed to commute by car and have easy access to the town centre. So it was acknowledged that any proposals needed to also accommodate local employees – either by having a permit system, or a suitably sited long-term car park.

The Town Council had therefore sent out a newsletter to every house in the parish (approximately 4,700 copies), asking for comments and suggestions on the above proposals and concerns.

The Town Clerk pointed out at this stage that some of the views expressed had seemed to be more in response to press articles, which had not been entirely accurate. However, one key finding was that commuters felt that they should not be penalised by having to pay to park. Also, many businesses were concerned that lack of local parking was driving their customer base elsewhere.

Other areas which caused most comment included:

- Sainsbury's employees blocked public car parks.
- Parking problems were perceived as being due to Breckland District Council's lack of strategic town planning, with some residents having to use car parks overnight because insufficient spaces had been allocated to their homes.
- That there were insufficient car parking facilities in the town and that it was impossible to find parking spaces as a shopper.
- Parking charges would be detrimental to the social aspect of the town.
- None of those who responded were in favour of having a multi-storey car park in Attleborough.

There was small support for the Town Council's proposal for 2 hours of free parking, with a concern that shoppers might go

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elsewhere if charges were introduced. There was also limited support for commuters to have allocated parking, and a view that residents already pay enough for services through their Council tax.

Members then discussed the findings, commenting that if over 4,700 leaflets had been distributed, then the actual number of responses fed back to the Town Council were surprisingly small. The Town Clerk concurred, adding that the Town Council had decided to send out leaflets as a result of the number of face-to-face comments they had been receiving.

It was thought that this relatively low response might be because many local residents were sceptical about the consultation, believing that they would not have any real input into the eventual outcome. There had been widespread feeling that the previous public meeting had been held at an inconvenient and unrealistic time for many residents.

The Town Clerk confirmed that they had also written to other interested parties, including Network Rail (who had not sent any response), and National Express East Anglia. The latter leased part of the land which was currently used as a car park at the railway station (the rest of that land – currently scrub – was owned by Network Rail). The station car park was considered to be badly laid out and suffered from overcrowding, with cars spilling over into the Football Club drive, where the Bowls Club also had parking spaces.

The Town Council had also heard back from Sainsbury's Head Office. They said that their employees were only allowed to use the store car park if they had shifts starting before 07.00 or after 21.00. 15 spaces were provided for employees directly behind the store. This meant that their car park was primarily for shoppers (who were also able to visit other local shops during their permitted 2-hours of free parking). Sainsbury's therefore felt that it was making a positive contribution towards the town's overall parking facilities.

Sainsbury's also paid for 12 slots at the Connaught Hall car park in Station Road. However some of their staff preferred to use the Edenside and Horsepit car parks, which were nearer the store.

A survey of their employees in March 2009 had revealed that 57% drove to work and the maximum on site at any one time was 40. This meant that the Sainsbury staff used 23 spaces each day. Sainsbury's therefore felt that whilst they possibly added to car parking problems in Attleborough, they were not the sole cause, and in some ways their car park actually helped support the town's facilities.

Lidl, the other major supermarket in Attleborough, permitted their shoppers to stay for a maximum of one hour. A staff member monitored usage, not least to ensure that those parking were

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actually customers.

The Town Council had approached Norfolk County Council (NCC) to see whether or not it would be practical to enter into some form of partnership scheme, or if NCC had any suitable land which could be developed as a car park. However NCC had no statutory remit to provide car parking and had referred the Town Council back to Breckland District Council for further consultation.

Members touched again on the surprisingly low response rate to the Town Council's call for comments.

In response, the Town Clerk said that car parking in the town had been a major concern for many years, and whilst they did not maintain a specific log, they regularly took phone calls, or had people visiting them, as well as hearing from Councillors who had been approached direct by angry or frustrated local residents. Specifically, there was dissatisfaction about the fact that there were no controls on the main street, no monitoring, or traffic wardens, to ensure a sensible turnover of parking spaces.

The Town Clerk added that if there could be some form of agency agreement, as in Swaffham, whereby the police enforced off-street parking, while there was decriminalisation and enforcement of on-street parking, then the Town Council would be very interested in looking further into this.

With regard to the turnover of parking in the town centre itself, one possible solution might be to have suitable out-of-town car parking arrangements for local employees, so that the centre would be freed-up for shoppers and visitors.

A Member commented that some of the criticism which had been aimed at the District Planning Committee in terms of permitting flats to be built with insufficient car parking facilities was not entirely justified. Whilst acknowledging that "half a parking space per flat" made no sense at all from a local perspective, unfortunately this did comply with national standards because Attleborough was classed as a "rural town".

The Town Clerk added that, in order to put the record straight, the Town Council had not set out by themselves to change Breckland Council's car parking policy, but rather had acted in response to their residents' concerns.

In drawing the discussion to a close, the Chairman said that the Town Council's findings were broadly in line with the results received from the UEA Business School students, which were to follow, and she thanked the Town Council for their contribution to the debate.

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**28/09 RESULTS OF PARKING SURVEY (AGENDA ITEM 7)**

The Chairman welcomed the students from the UEA Business School, who gave a presentation summarising the results of the research undertaken in Attleborough.

Having studied their brief, they had designed a suitably focussed questionnaire and sampled a cross-section of the public in the town centre, at the railway station, and at Sainsbury's. The survey had been conducted over a two week period from 06.45 to 19.00, with over 900 questionnaires then analysed.

Key results included:

- The main reason for travelling to Attleborough was to shop.
- The vast majority of visitors, many of whom came from within the Attleborough postcode, used a car.
- Many only stayed for an hour or two, but the town also needed to cater for those needing longer term parking.
- Most travelled daily, or weekly.
- Sainsbury's car park was by far the busiest, with Queen's Square, the Railway Station and Lidl's also proving popular. Given the choice, however, most people would prefer to be able to use Queen's Square.
- The vast majority felt that parking problems in Attleborough were likely to get worse in the future unless dealt with soon, and that congestion was a serious problem throughout the day. Parking problems were perceived as adding to congestion as people re-entered the one-way system whilst driving round to find slots.
- Those who were most seriously impacted by the lack of parking were business users and shoppers.
- There were mixed views about the possible impact of the introduction of parking charges, with a slight majority feeling that charges, 'park and ride', or car sharing schemes, would not particularly help ease the problem, nor ease traffic congestion.
- Slim majorities believed that the introduction of a 'pay and display' system would help ease traffic congestion; and that supermarket car parking should be regulated through ticket validation.
- By far the strongest views were:
  - that Attleborough needed more town centre parking spaces;

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- that there should be improved parking facilities at the railway station; and
- against Attleborough having a multi-storey car park.

The students then presented some possible solutions, along with suggested means of implementation:

- Re-design current car parks in order to maximise use of the space available. Some projects could be achieved relatively easily as well as cost-effectively. Queen's Square was cited as having the potential to achieve about 20% more space.
- It was suggested that there should be designated long and short-stay car parks. Whilst there would be more initial cost involved, and possibly other difficulties, these could accommodate different needs and ensure turnover when and where it was most needed. This approach could also provide a source of revenue.
- Automated signage systems, as operated in Norwich and other large towns, could help with traffic congestion. (Though it was acknowledged that this might not be the best solution for Attleborough, not least as some might find them a visual eyesore in an essentially rural town.)
- Improved and increased public transport into the town centre, especially from villages and towns to the north of Attleborough.
- Implementation of the "walking bus" scheme, or having school drop-off points, to help ease traffic and parking congestion associated with school hours.
- Running a 'Healthy Ad' campaign to encourage less use of cars by those in and around the centre of Attleborough.
- The possible underground expansion of the Queen's Square car park, or even building a multi-storey car park to create more town centre parking, might be longer term solutions, bearing in mind the planned expansion. However, a combination of public opposition and sheer expense meant that these were unlikely to be realistic solutions in the immediate future.

The students' concluded that there was clearly already a car parking problem in Attleborough, which was likely to be exacerbated by the projected town growth. They therefore felt that a sensible long term solution should be the main focus, whilst maintaining a sensitive approach to the needs and concerns of the local community, both current and future.

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Members then discussed some of the key points arising from the presentation, which they acknowledged as playing a very useful role in their intelligence-gathering and review process.

It was clear that the combination of the one way system, school traffic, through-lorries, as well as the impact of the level crossing, meant that Attleborough faced some unique local congestion problems, especially at key times of the day. Most of these would need to be factored-in to any proposals as they were unlikely to change for the better in the immediate future.

A Member reported that the flexi-bus scheme serving the northern villages operated only during a limited time span during the school term. However, flexi-bus schemes had proved a vital link between rural communities, since many of the main bus routes run by NCC had been discontinued over recent years as they were no longer economically viable.

Another Member pointed out that the flexi bus scheme in Dereham had expanded over recent years, to serve a wider part of the community. It could be anticipated, therefore, that as Attleborough grew, then so would a suitable network of local transport.

However, it was clear that, aside from future plans, increased town centre parking and an adequate turnover of spaces were vital in terms of supporting both the business community and all those who wanted to visit and access the town centre facilities. Also that sensible arrangements needed to be in place to accommodate commuters and those looking to park for longer periods.

The campaigns based on encouraging people (especially school children) to walk, might be worth following up as they could have a positive impact on traffic congestion and parking issues at specific times of the day. However, it was felt that these might only have a limited effect unless they really 'took off' and became very popular, not least because of parental concerns over safety etc.

With respect to possibly re-designing the Queen's Square car park to produce more spaces, this was certainly felt to be worth further consideration. Some trees would need to be removed, but these could be replaced. A new design could also produce more open space from a monitoring (i.e. safety) perspective. However, local flooding issues meant that some Members were sceptical about how realistic an underground car park might be for that site.

The Chairman ended the discussion by thanking the students once again for their helpful input and contribution to the Council's Review.

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**29/09 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 8)**

The Scrutiny Officer said that he planned to invite colleagues from the Capita (Planning) and Asset Management teams to the next meeting, since focussed input and guidance from experts would prove helpful to the group at this stage of their Review.

He also planned to ask officers from Yarmouth Borough Council to attend a future meeting, to outline and discuss their permit-parking schemes.

The Chairman then reiterated that there would be a public meeting held in Attleborough at some point in the New Year, enabling local residents to have their say.

However, she added that as the Task & Finish Group was still very much at the evidence-gathering stage, and needed time to focus and assess options, the public meeting was likely to be scheduled towards the end of February, rather than earlier.

The Group were mindful of the ongoing Local Development Framework (LDF) meetings and timetable, and there would also be appropriate liaison with the LDF Action Plan and the Principal Planning Officer.

In terms of the wider timetable, it was hoped that the Group would be able to put together some draft proposals by the end of March, and then, in final report form, to the Overview & Scrutiny Commission at the end of April.

Meanwhile, it was agreed that the next meeting of the Task & Finish Group would take place on 12 January 2010 at 10.00, with the venue to be confirmed, but likely to be at Elizabeth House, Dereham.

The meeting closed at 3.25 pm

CHAIRMAN