

**FINAL REPORT**  
**PARKING TASK & FINISH GROUP**  
**ATTLEBOROUGH**  
**MARCH 2010**

Summary

1. This report sets out the findings from a review of on and off street parking undertaken by the Parking Task and Finish Group. It represents the initial phase of the Group's remit, in that it relates solely to the town of Attleborough, and the investigation took from July 2009 to March 2010.
2. The Group met eight times (including two fully participatory public meetings in Attleborough), undertook site visits to all Breckland owned car parks in the five market towns of the District, engaged with stakeholders and the public throughout the review period and commissioned an in-depth public survey using a highly regarded academic institution.
3. The Group takes this opportunity to record its formal appreciation and thanks to all the stakeholders and agencies, the officers and members of Breckland Council as well as the residents of the District for assisting in this significant review of car parking. We also express particular thanks to the hard work and enthusiasm of students from the UEA's Norwich Business School in undertaking the research work which forms the primary evidence base to this report.

Introduction, Background & Methodology

4. A Parking Task and Finish Group was established under the direction of and reporting to the Overview & Scrutiny Commission in the summer of 2009. The Group comprised Councillors Mark Kiddle-Morris (Chairman), Philip Duigan, Diana Irving, Shirley Matthews, Keith Martin, Derek Mortimer, Pauline Quadling, Brian Rose and Pam Spencer. The scrutiny lead and project co-ordinating officer was Mark Broughton.
5. Initially the Group was charged with exploring issues relating to the Council's own car parks in its market towns. However the review was subsequently refocused in September 2009 to take account of a request from Attleborough Town Council to examine the pressing local issue of parking and congestion in that town.
6. In November 2009 Shirley Matthews assumed the Chairmanship of the Group following Mark Kiddle-Morris appointment as a member of the Breckland Cabinet and Councillor David Myers joined the Group.

7. At the first meeting on 27 July 2009 the Group agreed its terms of reference (Appendix 1) and Project Plan (Appendix 2). From the outset the Group agreed that each town would be judged on its respective merits and thus a one size fits all approach was untenable

8. In late August 2009 the Group undertook site visits to all 29 Breckland owned car parks over a two-day period. Members noted the conditions within the car parks (i.e. signage, white lining, access, lighting, surface condition, CCTV provision as well as more mundane issues such as layout, litter and general appearance). There then followed seven formal meetings of the Group on the following dates:

14 September 2009

13 October 2009

17 November 2009

10 December 2009

12 January 2010

22 February 2010

15 March 2010

9. As part of the review, the Group took a wealth of evidence and information from a wide variety of sources, listed as follows:

Vera Dale – Mayor of Attleborough

Hilary Elias – Town Clerk (Attleborough Town Council)

David Lazenby – J Sainsbury Ltd

Adam Hayes – Inspector (Norfolk Constabulary)

Paul Sellick – Planning and Transportation (Norfolk County Council)

Terry Cracknell – Attleborough Chamber of Commerce & Industry

Peter Thatcher – Connaught Hall Trustees

Dr Lindner – Queens Square Surgery

James Stewart – National Express East Anglia

Michelle Earp – Car Park Manager (South Norfolk DC)

Dave McCall – Car Park Inspector (South Norfolk DC)

Richard Bishop – Town Clerk (Swaffham Town Council)

David Spencer – Principal Planning Policy Manager (Breckland DC)

David Green – Project Manager (Breckland Council)

Anthony Wright - Building Services Manager (Breckland Council)

Steve Udberg – Head of Asset Management (Breckland DC)

R H Middleton – Chairman (Taking Attleborough Forward)

In addition, some 9 letters were received from members of the public and were admitted into the evidence record of the review. A summary of stakeholder views is attached at Appendix 7.

10. The Group commissioned a research project from the University of East Anglia's Norwich School of Business to gauge the views of local residents in Attleborough and district to issues related to car parking and congestion in Attleborough. The survey period ran from 19 to 31 October and included

Saturday the 24 but not Sunday 25 October. The final sample size was 911 and the headline findings from the research are shown at Appendix 3.

### Policy Position & Finance

11. Breckland Council's long-standing policy in relation to charging for public parking in its car parks is that parking has been provided free across the District. This policy position is unusual in that Breckland remains amongst a select handful of second tier councils in England that do not charge for car parking. Historically the Council has recognised that maintaining the commercial vitality of market towns through having a non-charging regime is the prime driver behind its policy position.

12. The lack of income from car parking has meant that the available funding to pay for car park upkeep and maintenance has been very modest, amounting to an annual budget of circa £50,000 in 2008/09 and £33,800 in 2009/10 (plus a separate amount for lighting maintenance). Nevertheless in the last few years' significant remedial works have taken place in Cowper Road, Dereham and Queens Square in Attleborough, funded by Breckland.

13. In 1995 the Council introduced short term parking orders covering four locations (The Guildhall and Cowper Road in Dereham, St Nicholas Street in Thetford and a cluster of small car parks in the centre of Swaffham comprising Pedlars, Market Place and Pit Lane). These orders allowed some legal control of the activities within the car parks (i.e. prohibiting trading from vehicles, selling cars etc) but the primary motivation behind their introduction was in order to set a short term parking limit of 2 hours and provide the basis for legal enforcement of those limits. Default fines of £12 (standard charge) and £20 (specifically for vehicles parked in a disabled bay without displaying a valid disabled blue or orange badge). The level of fines has not been reviewed in the intervening 15 years since the orders were made and no further parking orders have been made.

14. The efficacy of such orders is mitigated if enforcement is not undertaken. The evidence has shown that enforcement is not carried out in Breckland owned car parks in Dereham and Thetford – and this has been the case for the last few years – but an agency agreement with Swaffham Town Council ensures that sporadic enforcement does take place there.

15. There are currently no parking orders (and therefore no enforcement being undertaken) in the two remaining Breckland towns of Attleborough and Watton.

### Attleborough

16. Attleborough is the third largest town in the District and as of 2001 had an estimated population of 9,430. It has good transport links on the north-south axis by road (A11) and rail to Norwich and Cambridge respectively. It is a growing town and is expected to see the allocation of a further 4000 dwellings over the next 16 years, effectively doubling the size of the town.

17. The commercial centre of the town is ringed by the central one way gyratory system formed by Exchange Street, Church Street, Surrogate Street and Connaught Road with High Street adjacent. Traffic flows are governed by the traffic entering the system from London Road (south west), Queens Road (north west), Station Road (south) and Norwich Road (north east). An added complication for flows is the level crossing on Station Road.

### Parking Provision

18. Current parking provision is realised both through off street car parks and on –street parking (see Appendix 4). The latter is presently unenforced though there remains the possibility that so-called “parking de-criminalisation” will take place in 2011, whereby responsibility for enforcement will pass from the Police to civilian authorities co-ordinated by the Norfolk County Council. Thus the possible impact of mid-term changes to on street regime needs to be borne in mind. Having said that, the actual capacity of on-street parking in the centre of Attleborough is actually quite restricted through the use double yellow lines.

19. Off street parking (i.e. car parks) is realised through both public provision and private enterprise. Supermarkets such as J Sainsbury Ltd (142 spaces) and to a lesser extent Lidl Gmbh (89 spaces) provide free parking for shoppers at their respective stores in the town centre. However each retailer applies short term parking limits (Sainsbury 2 hours and Lidl 1 hour) which are regularly enforced through a private firm.

20. Pressure on capacity is already evident though, with staff at Sainsbury’s discouraged from parking on site at the High Street store. Instead, provision has been made by the company for staff to park at Connaught Hall but site visits in August 2009 clearly show evidence that some Sainsbury staff are opting to park at the Breckland owned Horse Pit and Edenside car parks instead, these being located somewhat nearer than Connaught Hall.

21. Other privately owned car parking can be found at Connaught Hall, behind Lloyds Pharmacy and at the nearby doctors’ surgery. There is no known enforcement action taking place in these locations as is the case at the railway station, a little further out from the immediate town centre.

22. Breckland owns three car parks in Attleborough, these being Queens Square (118 spaces), Edenside (49) and Horse Pit (20) bringing the total to some 187 spaces (see Appendix 5 for locations – shaded red is Queens Square, green is Edenside and yellow is Horse Pit). Height barriers are located in each car park to restrict commercial vehicles gaining access. They are well-used but the lack of any parking orders means that their use is uncontrolled and unregulated.

23. The estimated total number of parking spaces both on and off street, private and council provided, is approximately 718 spaces.

## Issue 1 – Charging & Enforcement of Off Street Parking

24. The Group sought to understand the pros and cons of a charging regime and noted the operation of charging at neighbouring South Norfolk DC whose market towns shared many similarities in terms of background with Attleborough, not the least of these being Wymondham. Parking charges had been introduced incrementally in the towns of Wymondham, Diss and Loddon and all the charging schemes built-in a free period covering either the first or second hour's parking. Whilst charging brought in a reasonable sum of money that could be allocated to future car park maintenance, there was a concern that the imposition of parking charges would detrimentally affect the commercial centre by driving people away to out of town stores providing free parking. At the same time, the charges being levied by South Norfolk Council were relatively modest with a ceiling of £3 for over 4 hours parking duration. The evidence suggested that despite some predictable public opposition to the introduction of parking charges initially, very soon communities had accepted the charging regime (for example at Loddon).

25. More widely, it was noted that other nearby councils operate a substantially enhanced car parking-charging regime (Appendix 6) which levies an excess fine of anywhere from around £20 to £75 and also made provision for the issuing of annual season tickets which also generate income of from £180 to £306 per annum. These are fairly substantial parking operations issuing in two cases in excess of 2,000 tickets each year.

26. The Group recognise that the introduction of charging would represent a fundamental break with Breckland's historical policy position of providing free parking in its car parks. The town council is supportive of such an approach with the caveat that free parking periods could be included e.g. the first hour or two, which would encourage turnover and have minimal impact on short-term users. This would generate income that could be ring-fenced to ensure that car parks in the town could be better maintained in future to counter wear and tear and thus benefit Attleborough locally rather than going into a central pot.

27. The downsides are that in identifying who would actually undertake the enforcement, the costs of infrastructure (barriers, ticket machines, signage, enforcement, administrative, legal etc) and essentially pass the point of no return once charging has been introduced – given the initial outlay. There is also a risk associated with potential theft from ticket machines holding cash, though the brand new CCTV system recently introduced in Attleborough includes two cameras located in Queens Square car park may offset this risk somewhat.

28. Stakeholder views on charging as an issue are largely ambivalent, with the notable exception of the Chamber of Commerce which is clearly opposed. The commissioned research also indicates a very modest majority opposed to charging, which given that nearly two-thirds of respondents were car users is perhaps not at all surprising. There was however a clear indication that if charging were to be introduced, then it should incorporate a similar approach

to South Norfolk DC and include a free parking period covering the first and/or second hour. The Group noted that Attleborough Town Council keenly promoted the introduction of car-parking charges as the answer to tackling the chronic shortage and turnover of public parking spaces.

29. The Group also considered the possibility of introducing an enforcement regime based on parking orders and provided by either an agency agreement with e.g. Attleborough Town Council or some other specialist provider. Evidence was taken from Swaffham Town Council in relation to the agency agreement operated by them on behalf of Breckland Council covering three town centre car parks in Swaffham. The orders specified parking limits of two hours duration and also a host of other controls relating to uses and prohibitions of use in the car parks. Enforcement was sporadic and random under the agreement and this approach results in a reasonably good turnover of parking spaces as car park users realise that enforcement action takes place.

30. Enforcement would be predicated on the use of short-term parking orders as are presently used sparingly in Dereham, Swaffham and Thetford. It was understood that the primary benefit of non-charging enforcement – so long as it was carried out at least on an occasional random basis - would be to increase turnover of parking spaces and thus prevent all day/long term parking which would generate capacity. Short term parking orders already in effect in other Breckland towns limit parking to 2 hours but notice is taken of the existing time-limited regimes operated by Lidl (1 hour) and Sainsbury (2 hours) in Attleborough. So long as at least random and sporadic enforcement takes place then turnover improvements will be realised but any lapse would inevitably see a reversion to bay blocking.

31. Attleborough Town Council have already expressed an interest in establishing an agency agreement – on similar lines as presently exists with Swaffham Town Council – to provide regular enforcement for a reasonably modest cost to Breckland, subject to negotiation. In 2009, Breckland paid Swaffham TC £2,430 to provide parking enforcement in the town centre car parks on the basis of at least six hours per week (totalling 312 hours per year). Costs have exceeded income received through fines over the last three years with figures being recorded as £1,692 in 2007/8, £1,392 in 2008/9 and £1,052 to date nearly at the end of the current financial year, 2009/10. Alternatively, the same private company currently provides enforcement to both Sainsbury and Lidl thus raising the possibility of a town-wide tie in.

32. Costs associated with this approach would be minimal for Breckland, comprising making and advertising the short term parking orders, providing signage and possible involvement in any legal cases arising from disputed tickets issued. Whilst there could be costs associated with installation of ticket machine(s) there is no obvious need to do so if an agency agreement was entered into so long as an appropriate documentation system was used (as happens in Swaffham). On the credit side some income – probably fairly modest depending on the level of default fine set – would help to offset the costs and provide funding for minor car park remedial works (e.g. signage).

33. The Group fully appreciates the need for an overall balanced picture of parking in the town centre and thus the need to designate appropriate long and short-term parking within Breckland's three car parks in Attleborough – Queens Square, Edenside Drive and Horse Pit. Evidence from Moving Attleborough Forward supports this approach. It is understood that any introduction of short term parking order enforcement would also assist in dealing positively with the known issue of Sainsbury staff – amongst others - parking all day in Edenside and Horse Pit car parks and any other dubious practices such as selling cars in public car parks, of which some evidence had come to light during the review.

#### **Recommendation 1**

**The Group recommends that the Council retains its policy of providing free parking in all three Breckland-owned car parks in Attleborough.**

#### **Recommendation 2**

**The Group recommends that the Council adopts parking orders to cover all three Breckland-owned car parks in Attleborough stipulating uses and prohibitions based on the parking orders made in 1995 in order to regulate car park use, facilitate enforcement and thus turnover of spaces.**

#### **Recommendation 3**

**The Group recommends that the Council undertakes in the first instance to seek an agency agreement with Attleborough Town Council to provide enforcement in Attleborough on a similar basis to the existing agreement operating in Swaffham. In the event that a partnership with Attleborough Town Council is not forthcoming, to then explore other agencies or options for enforcement accordingly.**

#### **Recommendation 4**

**The Group recommends that the Council adopts a three hour limit in short term parking orders applicable in Attleborough with a basic default fine levied of at least £30 (given that the equivalent fines at J Sainsbury is £50 and £70 at Lidl).**

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#### **Recommendation 5A**

The Group recommends the Council designate the Queens Square and Horse Pit car parks in their respective entirety as short-stay parking areas with a two hour limit, and retain designation of Edenside as a long stay car park with no parking limit. This recommendation would result in 138 short-stay spaces and 49 long-stay spaces in Breckland's car parks.

**OR**

## Recommendation 5B

***The Group recommends the Council create short and long term parking areas within all three Attleborough car parks on the basis of 50:50 at Edenside with 100% short stay in Horse Pit and two thirds short stay, one third long stay in Queens Square. This recommendation would result in 123 short-stay spaces and 64 long-stay spaces in Breckland's car parks.***

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## Recommendation 6

**The Group recommends that J Sainsbury Ltd take appropriate action to effectively manage staff parking at their store, while acknowledging that imposition of enforceable short term parking orders should largely resolve this issue from the Council's point of view, and encourage staff to park at Connaught Hall, further to the local agreement which is in place.**

### Issue 2 – On Street Parking (Enforcement)

34. Evidence from Norfolk County Council and Norfolk Constabulary indicate that de-criminalisation of on street parking in Norfolk countywide is likely to happen in 2011. Presently it is the responsibility of the police to enforce on street parking infractions however operationally this is a low priority for them in Attleborough. Accordingly, lack of enforcement leads to abuse of existing controlled zones rendering them less effective and putting additional pressure on other parking areas. The Group acknowledges that realistically on street enforcement through yellow lining is unlikely to be satisfactorily dealt with until de-criminalisation is effected, but that certainly an approach could be made to both the Police in the short term to undertake enforcement in Attleborough. Likewise it is felt appropriate to suggest that the County Council and Police jointly manage the de-criminalisation process in a bid to get this completed as soon as possible.

35. The Group also considered the possibility of introducing on street residents permit parking schemes (see also paragraphs 47 to 49 below). Such schemes would exhibit controls over where residents can park and could prove of benefit in helping to manage local parking problems. However it was agreed that permit parking should not be pursued at this time (Minute 6/10). While there are clear benefits of such schemes taken holistically that will potentially ease parking for local residents whilst at the same time providing an income stream to Breckland. On the downside, there is again the question of who would undertake the enforcement and the related costs of doing so.

## Recommendation 7

**The Group recommend that Norfolk Constabulary resumes operational random on-street enforcement in the centre of Attleborough at an early opportunity in order to increase turnover of parking spaces.**

## **Recommendation 8**

**The Group recommends that Breckland Council, Norfolk County Council and Norfolk Constabulary liaise over de-criminalisation of on-street parking in Attleborough in a multi-agency approach, seeking a transfer of responsibility and action enabled through joined-up thinking and use of resources.**

### Issue 3 – Car Park Capacity and Re-design

36. The commissioned research suggested that re-design of the Queens Square car park would potentially result in the creation of 20% more parking spaces. However the Group recognise that there remain issues concerning costs, and pertinent planning factors (such as tree preservation orders and that the site is in a conservation area) as well as fundamentals over whether the suggested numbers of new spaces created would be actually be realised, as queried by Breckland officers.

37. Whilst the Attleborough Chamber of Commerce and Industry has expressed a wish to see significantly increased capacity at Queens Square or elsewhere in the town centre, the Group considered that this would be a long term aspiration, and certainly the evidence is that provision of a multi-storey car park is not currently supported by the public through the research undertaken.

38. National Express East Anglia/ Network Rail had indicated in October 2009 that there were plans to expand the existing small car park at Attleborough station which is currently usually over capacity. Members noted that the over capacity was a potential health and safety hazard as vehicles were parked haphazardly in any available space. The timetable for these expansion works is unclear but assuming that the works are carried out it was likely that the rail operator would introduce a charging regime in order to offset the costs incurred. Whilst increasing capacity for rail commuters there is a risk that commuters will simply park elsewhere nearby for free, thus impacting detrimentally on the general parking situation in the town.

39. The Group was made aware of a significant area of land to the rear of Norfolk County Council's adult training centre in Station Road which could potentially be used for car parking and which due to its location would be very convenient for rail users/commuters.

## **Recommendation 9**

**The Group recommends that the Council instructs Breckland officers to explore possible re-design of the Queens Square car park to generate additional parking spaces, whilst cognisant of costs and planning considerations.**

## **Recommendation 10**

**The Group recommends that the Council instructs Breckland senior officers to liaise directly with officials of National Express East Anglia, Norfolk County Council and Network Rail to be apprised of the expected expansion of the rail station car park. The rail operator is also requested to give immediate attention to the condition of its buildings in the vicinity of the rail station given the potential health and safety issue.**

## **Recommendation 11**

**The Group recommends that the Council instructs senior officers to liaise with Norfolk County Council to ascertain whether there is a possibility of utilising the land behind the adult training centre in Station Road as a car park, on either an interim or permanent basis, thus adding local parking capacity.**

### Issue 4 – Car Park Conditions and Signage

40. Members feel that signage within the car parks in Attleborough – both within and without (i.e. route signage) – was substandard, following the site visits undertaken in August 2009. The position was particularly acute in Horse Pit, and to a lesser degree in Edenside. Surface markings were extremely faded in these two car parks.

41. It was noted that new CCTV cameras had been installed in Queens Square car park during the course of the review and the Group welcomes this as a crime deterrent.

42. The opportunity of providing interactive enhanced signage was discussed but the Group concludes that in a town the size of Attleborough, albeit with serious growth in the pipeline, that such signage was not presently justified. However future development plans might be the opportunity to provide such interactive signs showing the real-time number of spaces available in the public car parks.

## **Recommendation 12**

**That Group recommends that the Council allocates sufficient funding and authorises remedial works at Horse Pit and Edenside to bring these car parks up to a reasonable standard.**

## **Recommendation 13**

**The Group recommends that the Council keeps the issue of interactive sign provision under review, in tandem with the expansion of Attleborough over the next 16 years and tied in to the planning process.**

### Issue 5 – Public Transport

43. Public transport links serving Attleborough are better than many other Norfolk market towns, with a National Express coach service to London and the airports as well as frequent trains to Norwich, Cambridge, the Midlands and beyond. However local services serving the town and its hinterland are much more sporadic.

44. The Group notes from the commissioned research that this lack of effective alternative was an indirect cause of the high traffic congestion levels in the town and hence the pressure on parking.

45. One form of transport that does operate locally is the flexi bus service operated by Norfolk County Council. Both the Wayland and Harling flexi bus routes serve Attleborough.

### **Recommendation 14**

**The Group recommends that Norfolk County Council undertake further local promotion and advertising of both the Harling and Wayland flexibus services in order to try to increase patronage and in doing so ease local parking problems.**

### Issue 6 – Planning Conditions

46. A particular issue in Attleborough concerns the number of flats and other residential dwellings located within the town centre which have been built over the years without including appropriate and adequate parking provision. This has led to long term parking in not just Breckland car parks but other private off street parking areas and on street also. With an historical lack of enforcement, the effect is to impede turnover of spaces and thus contributing to the overall parking problem in the town. The extent of control exercisable by Breckland over central government regulation remains unclear.

### **Recommendation 15**

**The Group recommends that should there be scope to do so, the Council should look to address provision of adequate parking for future developments in town centres (particularly in relation to flats) by amending its planning policies accordingly.**

### Issue 7 – Permit Parking

47. The Group considered the viability of introducing a residents permit scheme to further assist parking control in the town. Such schemes are common and apply to on-street parking in residential areas and fringe commercial/residential areas. The Police have indicated support for such a measure to be introduced in Attleborough however the Town Council feel that the only notable residential area experiencing problems from on-street parking was in Edenside Drive, adjacent to the Council's Edenside car park.

48. Such permit parking schemes were within the jurisdiction of the County Council and the relevant legislation governing their use was the Road Traffic Act 1984.

49. The Group recognises that given the issues over adequate enforcement arrangements, the apparent lack of target residential streets that would benefit from the adoption of a permit scheme and the general lack of capacity in parking in the town centre that the issue of permit parking schemes should not proceed further at the present time.

### **Recommendation 16**

**The Group recommends that permit parking schemes should not be sought at present in Attleborough but that the issue remain under review, in conjunction with the future ongoing development of the town.**

### Conclusions

50. The Group has spent a considerable amount of time and effort in undertaking the review of parking in Attleborough, recognising the particular idiosyncrasies pertinent to the town. The views of a wide variety of agencies and the public have been sought to participate, provide different viewpoints that inform the review and fully reflect the value of meaningful community engagement. The review has concentrated on what is achievable within the short term, to alleviate the worst of the parking problems and its recommendations seek to ensure good turnover of parking spaces, backed by suitable enforcement without advocating the introduction of charging at this difficult economic time.

51. In the medium to long term and with the expected further residential growth of the town over the next 15 years, there will be a need to reconsider the effects of growth and make provision for longer term solutions in Attleborough; whether additional parking, park and ride schemes or the introduction of permit parking schemes.

52. In order to track progress and ensure compliance with the stated recommendations one further recommendation is made.

### **Recommendation 17**

**The Group recommends that an action plan be devised in order to track implementation of the recommendations and report progress into the Overview and Scrutiny Commission in December 2010.**

53. The recommendations put forward are essentially uncosted but in many cases will be of a modest or nil financial impact on the Council.

54. The Group asks the Overview & Scrutiny Commission to consider and support the recommendations contained within this report and for Cabinet to support and endorse the recommendations put forward.

### Appendices

Appendix 1 – Review Terms of Reference

Appendix 2 – Project Plan

Appendix 3 – Key Findings from the Commissioned Research

Appendix 4 – Breakdown of Parking Provision in Attleborough

Appendix 5 - Location of Breckland-owned car parks in Attleborough

Appendix 6 – Comparison of local authority parking regimes

Appendix 7 – Summary of Stakeholder views

### Background Documents

Best Value Review of Car Parking (2001)

Breckland Council-Swaffham Town Council Agency Agreement

Short-Term Parking Orders

Commissioned Research from the UEA Norwich Business School

Reports & Minutes of the Parking Group meetings (July 2009 to March 2010)