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**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the**

**PARKING TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

**Held on Tuesday, 17 November 2009 at 2.00 pm in  
Attleborough Town Hall**

**PRESENT**

Mr P.J. Duigan  
Mr K. Martin  
Mrs S.M. Matthews  
Mr D.G. Mortimer

Mrs P. Quadling  
Mr B. Rose  
Mrs P.A. Spencer

**Also Present**

Mr P.S. Francis  
Mr A.P. Joel

Mr A.C. Stasiak

**In Attendance**

Richard Bishop  
Mark Broughton  
Sheila Cresswell  
Michelle Earp  
David McCall

Town Clerk, Swaffham Town Council  
Member Development and Scrutiny Officer  
Member Services Officer  
Car Park Manager, S.Norfolk District Council  
Car Park Inspector, S. Norfolk District Council

15 members of the public were also in attendance at the meeting, including the Mayor of Attleborough, the Attleborough Town Council Clerk, and a representative from the Taking Attleborough Forward Group.

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**19/09 ELECTION OF A CHAIRMAN**

The Member Development and Scrutiny Officer (MDSO) opened the meeting by explaining that the former Chairman was unable to continue serving on this Group as he had now become a member of the Cabinet.

In lieu of a new Chairman being confirmed, and after being duly nominated and seconded, it was

**Agreed** that Mrs S. M Matthews would act as Chairman for this meeting.

**20/09 MINUTES (AGENDA ITEM 1)**

It was noted that the representative who had attended from the Norfolk Constabulary had been Inspector Hayes, not Bates.

Subject to this amendment, the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2009 were confirmed as a correct record.

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**21/09 APOLOGIES (AGENDA ITEM 2)**

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs D. Irving.

The MDSO gave an apology on behalf of Ricky Wright from North Norfolk District Council. (He had been invited to speak at the meeting but was unable to attend for family reasons.)

**22/09 CAR PARK RESEARCH IN ATTLEBOROUGH (AGENDA ITEM 5)**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. Members of the Working Group and guest speakers were asked to briefly introduce themselves to those present.

The MDSO then gave a brief update of progress on the commissioned research since the last meeting which had been held on 13 October at the Connaught Hall. Students from the UEA Business School had commenced work on their study and had used Attleborough as the pilot stage. They were due to present a full breakdown of their findings to the Group at the next meeting on 10 December 2009.

A brief overview of the Attleborough results included the following points of interest:

- The survey had been undertaken over the fortnight 19-31 October, including Saturday 24<sup>th</sup>, but not Sunday 25<sup>th</sup>.
- Areas covered during the exercise included:
  - Various days/times of the week car parking facilities were used.
  - Modes of travel.
  - Frequency of visits.
  - Length of parking.
  - Car parks used most frequently.
  - Views on charging and enforcement methods.
  - Views on Congestion.
- The sample size had been 911. (*1,000 was the nominal maximum.*)
- Age range of respondents: 16-92.
- Gender balance of respondents: 57% female / 43% male.
- Time range: 06.55 – 1830 (with peak times noted as 10.30, but with 08.30, 13.00 and 15.00 as flash points).

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- Other key statistics included:
  - Queen's Square: nearly 50% of respondents.
  - Sainsbury's car park: nearly 40% of respondents.
  - Railway station: 15% of respondents.
  
  - 55% of respondents lived in Attleborough.
  - 40% were from nearby rural villages.
  - 5% were from further away – Norwich etc.
  
  - 62% of those questioned had arrived by car.
  - 47% were shopping.
  - 20% were commuters.

The MDSO mentioned that the survey had produced some interesting paradoxes.

On the question of whether consideration should be given to building a multi-storey car park for Attleborough, most respondents had strongly disagreed; however 30% had agreed that Attleborough needed more town centre car parking.

He concluded the update by reiterating that full results would be reported at the next meeting on the 10 December.

A Member queried whether the survey had included noting the number of cars which had clearly been parked overnight. The MDSO said that this would hopefully be answered by the presentation in December.

There was some discussion about the venue for the next meeting, as it was felt that it should perhaps be held in Attleborough so that local residents could attend. However, the Chairman reminded everyone that, at this stage, the Group were embarked on an information-gathering exercise: the emphasis therefore needed to be on listening to, and focussing on, research-based evidence, rather than debating the 'pros and cons' more widely. It was also acknowledged that as the UEA group had specifically requested presentation facilities, it was likely to be difficult to find a suitable venue in Attleborough at such relatively short notice.

Members noted the report. The Chairman confirmed that the next meeting would be held at Elizabeth House in Dereham at 14.00 on Thursday, 10 December, but with the aim of holding an open public meeting in Attleborough sometime in the New Year, at which the public would have an opportunity to participate.

**23/09 CAR PARKING ENFORCEMENT REGIMES (AGENDA ITEM 6)**

**(a) Presentation by Representatives from South Norfolk District Council**

Michelle Earp (Car Parking Manager) and David McCall (Car Park Inspector), had been invited to outline South Norfolk

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District Council's off-street parking enforcement regimes.

Michelle began by saying that she had been in post for about 18 months and that David was one of two Inspectors who covered their District.

Key points made were:

- South Norfolk have had car parking charges in Diss since 1986.  
(8 x car parks)
- Also in Wymondham since 2001.  
(4 x car parks)
- Charges had only been introduced in Loddon in 2008.  
(2 x car parks)
- A total of 14 ticket machines had been installed throughout the District.
- South Norfolk did not operate a 'blue badge' system. However, if all disabled spaces were in use, then disabled drivers were entitled to use other slots free of charge.
- Excess charges were administered by Great Yarmouth Borough Council. This was essentially because they had good administrative systems in place, and it therefore made sense from a financial perspective to engage in collaborative working.
- Excess charges were £20 for payment within 7 days and £50 for payment within 14 days. However they generally tried to take a 'softly, softly' approach when pursuing excess charges.
- Across the District approximately 50 parking tickets were issued per week.
- Season tickets were available at a cost of £200 per year and were available for local residents and workers.
- In order to facilitate a continuous flow, season tickets were limited to 50% of spaces in each car park.
- METRIC were the company employed to maintain the ticket machines and they were obliged to attend within 16 hours to fix any problems. The current contract cost £380 per year, per machine (i.e. x 14).
- The total number of car parking spaces across the district was 800.

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- There was no overnight charging (08.00 – 18.00), nor on Sundays or Bank Holidays.

A Member then asked whether or not South Norfolk District Council made any money from car parking charges.

Michelle Earp indicated that this was not really the case, since any profits were ploughed directly back into car park maintenance and improvements (resurfacing/lighting etc) across the District.

Another Member commented that in Attleborough there was a mix of District Council-owned and Supermarket, or privately-owned, car parks. He assumed this would be the case in many towns and also wondered if, when charges were first introduced in Loddon, many users had simply switched from car parks to on-street parking.

Michelle Earp acknowledged that this had initially happened in Loddon and on-street parking (including directly outside businesses or in residential streets), had become something of a problem. However, this had settled down, since the season tickets were relatively cheap and, over time, people had adapted. Indeed, many had reverted to using car parks, despite the charges, chiefly because of their more convenient locations and the relative ease of finding a space. She added that South Norfolk District Council had no jurisdiction over on-street parking.

She also added that where they had no other car parking facilities available, local residents were given a 50% discount on season tickets.

Additionally, the Cooperative supermarket in Loddon paid an annual fee to the Council so that users of their car park could have up to 2 hours free parking. (Similar arrangements with supermarkets in Diss and Wymondham allowed for an hour's free parking.)

When asked if it had been difficult to apply charges, or if there had been some sort of 'kick-back' from town centre employees when charging had first been introduced, Michelle Earp acknowledged that whilst it remained vital for each town centre to be accessible to employees and visitors, many employees had purchased season tickets without complaint – and these were certainly a great deal cheaper than charges faced by those working in Norwich.

That said, season ticket rates remained a concern in relation to local income levels and a balance needed to be achieved. Local residents were able to get a 50% discount, but local employees had to pay the full rate.

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David McCall said that many large firms in the District opted to pay something towards staff car parking charges, such as helping with the purchase of season tickets. A member contrasted this by referring to Sainsbury's in Attleborough, where staff were not allowed to use the store car park but had to make alternative arrangements in town.

The Chairman expressed concern that in Attleborough, as with many such towns, there was established housing near the centre of town without private car parking facilities. There would need to be some scheme which would enable such residents to park on the street outside their homes – perhaps some form of "Residence Ticket". Extra care would then need to be taken in terms of potential impact such parking could have on narrow streets. However, these were issues which could be taken to later meetings for discussion.

A Member asked if allocation of a season ticket guaranteed a specific parking space. Michelle Earp said that they were unable to do this – and this was made clear on each ticket. She added that season tickets were not transferable between towns, but were only valid for the place of issue. There was also a limit of two registration numbers per ticket – i.e. the season ticket was inter-changeable between two specific vehicles, but would not be valid for use by visitors etc.

The MDSO asked if the issue of season tickets had made an impact on the capacity of car parks, because clearly some slots were thereby effectively pre-booked. He also wondered if the introduction of charging in Loddon had improved general turnover in its car parks.

Michelle Earp said that in each car park there was a combination of 'Pay and Display' and season ticket parking so that the flow and turnover had improved.

David McCall added that before charges had been introduced they had undertaken surveys in the car parks. At that stage, many Loddon residents had complained that they were regularly unable to find a space. Whereas since the charging scheme had been introduced, it was acknowledged that things had greatly improved and more spaces had become available. The two free hours offered by the supermarket had contributed to the sense that the scheme had been largely beneficial.

The Ward Member for Queens (Attleborough) commented that he had heard that one town in South Norfolk had applied to have their parking charges removed. He also wondered about the impact on local Council Tax rates when parking charges had been introduced.

Michelle Earp was not aware of any town having formally applied to have charges removed, but added that it might be a case of people inquiring about having a 'stepped' charging fee

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locally – e.g. 30p for the first hour, 50p thereafter. This might suit a particular locality better.

As to Council Tax, she repeated that all profit from car parking charges was fed directly back to car park maintenance and improvements of the Council-owned car parks. However, by way of clarification, she said that any income which was allocated to car parks from the Council Tax receipts was specifically directed towards the support of *non-Council-owned car parking facilities* (e.g. car parks attached to playgrounds and other open spaces etc), as these also needed to be maintained to reasonable standards.

Having taken a question from a Councillor in the public gallery, the Chairman then gave a member of the public the opportunity to ask something. The audience member commented that, having been a resident of Attleborough for four years he felt the town had benefitted from free parking. However, recent housing developments had resulted in a dramatic growth of population with no suitable improvements to parking facilities. The Chairman acknowledged this comment, stating that the Task & Finish Group had been set up to try to address some of these problems. The Chairman then reiterated at this point that this was not an open public meeting. Instead, it was part of a process during which members of the public were very welcome to attend and listen to the evidence being presented, and the questions Panel members were asking. There would be opportunity for public consultation in the New Year.

A member of the Group then raised a concern about local retailers losing trade as a result of car parking charges having been introduced. Michelle Earp confirmed that in all three towns there had indeed been some initial concerns, but added that things had settled down. As a result of a car parking review which South Norfolk had carried out last year, it had been decided to continue with existing schemes.

Finally, Michelle Earp confirmed that much of the administration of their schemes was carried out centrally (by Great Yarmouth Borough Council), rather than at Town Council level, since the latter often had limited resources available for such work.

**(b) Presentation from Swaffham Town Council**

Richard Bishop (Town Clerk) was in attendance to represent Swaffham Town Council. He tabled a 'SWOT' analysis and explained that Swaffham had managed its car parking enforcement on an agency basis for about ten years. It was the only market town in Breckland to have an agency arrangement. However, this was on a small scale, with a car parking attendant being assigned to work for few hours each week. Funding for the salary came from Breckland District Council and the Town Council itself.

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In order to maximise the impact, it had been agreed that the time spent on patrolling (as opposed to the administrative part of the role) would be ad hoc, rather than for specific time slots each week. By working in a random pattern, it was hoped to give an impression that more overall hours were worked, thereby deterring public complacency.

He acknowledged that the open layout in the centre of Swaffham posed unique challenges in terms of on-street, as against off-street parking. The fact that different parking designations sometimes existed side-by-side with each other, led to some confusion and anger when members of the public were given parking tickets, not least because of the difference in enforcement levels (Breckland fines were £12.00, whilst the police charged £35.00). It was felt that the centralisation - and decriminalisation - of parking arrangements would be of definite benefit to the town. However, whilst the problems were recognised, it was not so easy to find a solution which would be practical and easily manageable.

In terms of hours worked, the current contract comprised 6 hours, but it was felt that an increase to 12-15 hours per week would enable the agency – and thus Town Council – to provide a much better level of service. As an example, he cited recent media interest in the town (as well as during the filming of *Kingdom*). On such occasions it would generally be helpful if the car parking attendant could be on duty.

Other key points Richard Bishop raised included:

- There was a large car park at Theatre Street, which was about 400 yards from the Town Centre and was frequently under-used. This could accommodate local employees free of charge, resulting in the potential for targeted charged parking in the centre of town.
- Alternatively, there could be a tiered charging system, with free parking for the first two hours. If this were to be introduced, local employees would need to apply for season tickets.
- It was essential that the parking system in front of the Assembly Rooms enabled frequent turnover of spaces since this was a particularly busy venue.
- The area known as “The Shambles” directly behind the Assembly Rooms was not a Breckland-owned car park. The Town Council had expressed an interest in running this, perhaps with local businesses paying a fee to issue permits for local employees. However, it was noted that ironically, once this sort of informal parking space became formalised, then usually the actual space available for parking was reduced because of the need to



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upgrade entrance/exits etc to meet legally acceptable standards.

Various broader scenarios were then discussed briefly by the Group, including:

- The advantages of having a centralised administration system. This could prove cost-efficient if car parking regimes were largely standardised across the whole district.
- Alternatively, it might be better for each Town Council to run its own scheme, tailored to specific local needs. This would require adequate financial support from the District Council.
- A final view was that some form of partnership working, between the District and Town Councils, might be the most practical option. Resources would need to be channelled carefully in response to local knowledge and input, and suitably robust and practical arrangements would need to be in place from the outset.

The Chairman then thanked all three guest speakers for having taken the time to attend the meeting, to outline their own experiences and to answer questions, as part of the Group's evidence-gathering exercise.

**24/09 NEXT MEETING (AGENDA ITEM 7)**

It was **AGREED** that:

1. The next meeting would be held at 14.00 on Thursday, 10 December in the Anglia Room, Elizabeth House, Dereham.
2. Attleborough Town Council representatives should be invited to outline results from their own research into local attitudes towards car parking facilities and enforcement.
3. The representative from North Norfolk District Council, who had been unable to attend this meeting, should also be re-invited to attend.
4. There would be a public meeting held in Attleborough in the New Year.

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The meeting closed at 2.55 pm

CHAIRMAN