

Extraordinary Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Thursday 23 January 2020 at 6.00 pm** in the **Conference Chamber West (FR1-09), West Suffolk House**, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU

Present: **Councillors**

Chair David Nettleton

Michael Anderson
Tony Brown
Mike Chester
Patrick Chung
Terry Clements
Stephen Frost

Paul Hopfensperger
Joe Mason
Jim Meikle
Marion Rushbrook
Ian Shipp

In attendance:

John Burns
Ian Houlder
David Palmer, Ward Member for Brandon West
Peter Stevens, Cabinet Member for Operations
Sara Mildmay-White, Cabinet Member for Housing
Phil Wittam

44. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Simon Brown, Simon Cole, Diane Hind and Lisa Ingwall-King.

45. Substitutes

The following substitution was declared:

Councillor Pat Hanlon substituting for Councillor Diane Hind.
Councillor Victor Lukaniuk substituting for Councillor Lisa Ingwall-King.

46. Public Participation

Prior to hearing from public speakers, and receiving the report, the Chair outlined the procedure for this particular Extraordinary Overview and Scrutiny meeting.

The following members of the public then spoke under this agenda item:

1. Frank Stennett, a local businessman from Bury St Edmunds and as a West Suffolk resident, made a general statement in connection with the

Parking Review Report. He stated that due to climate change the owners of all environmentally friendly vehicles should be allowed to park for free, as well as blue badge holders.

2. Mark Skinner, a local businessman representing Brandon traders, addressed the Committee in connection with the Parking Review Report. Mr Skinner owned a funeral business for over 30 years and he believed bringing in parking charges would be the final nail in coffin for Brandon. He identified that Brandon did not have national brand traders and understood traders were struggling to pay bills. Mr Skinner raised concern that parking charges would also reduce footfall to the town and if people had to pay £1 to park in the High Street they would not stay in the town. Whilst Mr Skinner welcomed traffic wardens in the town, he asked the Committee to please reconsider proposals to charge and suggested speaking with the people of Brandon. He summed up by stating a petition had been set up, which had over 2,000 signatures which was against charging in Brandon.
3. Eddie Stewart, a resident from Brandon, addressed the Committee in connection with the Parking Review Report. He had lived in Brandon for over 30 year and was a District Councillor for Forest Heath District Council for 12 years. He explained that bring in parking charges would not improve the viability of Brandon. He believed staff working in Brandon would be affected by parking charges and asked the Committee to consider the potential displacement of traffic to side roads.
4. Mark Cordell, Chief Executive Officer from Our Bury St Edmunds Business Improvement District who represented over 400 business in Bury St Edmunds, made a statement in connection with the Parking Review report. He acknowledged there had not been any parking increases over several years and the reduction of Government grants but highlighted that 2019 was the worst footfall in the town for several years. He felt parking tariffs discriminate against the low paid and that some of the proposed increases in rates in the report were 50-60%. He believed the proposal to remove the free from 3 parking initiative was disappointing. Mr Cordell highlighted the flexi park trial and had been in regular conversations with the Cabinet Member for Operations, Councillor Peter Stevens, about this. He felt there were some good proposals in the report but would suggest deferral or that they were gradually introduced over a three-year period.
5. James Sheen, founder of We Love Bury St Edmunds, made a statement in connection with the Parking Review Report. He advised that a petition was running asking for two free days parking across West Suffolk, with one of those days being on market days. He felt having free parking on a Wednesday would bring in more people into Bury St Edmunds and to the market. He recognised Civil Parking Enforcement would be implemented soon but high street shops were declining and assistance from the Council was vital.

In response, the Chair explained it was estimated that the Council subsidised the "free from 3" scheme Tuesdays in Bury St Edmunds by approximately £80,000 per year.

The Monitoring Officer set out the procedure on how petitions should be submitted to the Council, and subsequent validation of signatories on petitions.

6. Rod Portwood, a local resident from Bury St Edmunds, addressed the Committee in connection with the Parking Review Report. He stated he had sent a list of his concerns on the parking proposals to his Ward Member. He raised issues around public transport and was concerned with the proposal to remove the free from 3 parking on Tuesdays. He felt Bury St Edmunds needed to have a better high street offer than Cambridge and he was concerned with the effect that the departure of a major retailer such as Debenhams could have on the Arc shopping centre. He asked that the Council makes Bury St Edmunds the go to town.

47. Report and Recommendations from the West Suffolk Parking Review Group

The Chair of the Review Group, who was also the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee gave a general introduction into the work which was carried out by the Review Group. The group had met nine times and at the conclusion of its remit, produced the attached report for the Committee's consideration and onward recommendation to Cabinet.

The Committee received Report No: OAS/WS/20/003, which provided the findings of the Parking Review Group set up by the Committee on 11 July 2019 with the following Terms of Reference:

- 1) To review national/local trends and evaluate the current performance of the parking service across all locations including usage, condition of the car parks, the quality of service delivery, enforcement, parking incentives and customer feedback.
- 2) To develop strategic aims and objectives for parking in West Suffolk with local parking plans aligned with on-street provision.
- 3) To consider the imminent service changes arising from the implementation of Civil Parking Enforcement and the impact on parking behaviour.
- 4) To consider current levels of occupancy, future capacity projections and any interventions that may be needed now and over the long term.
- 5) To assess park and walk and the flexible payment system currently being trialled in Bury St Edmunds.
- 6) To review car park tariffs for the period of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, backed by consultation
- 7) To identify service improvement and efficiencies

This review had been commissioned by the Cabinet Member for Operations to review parking in West Suffolk.

The report set out in detail the background and context; user research; stakeholder engagement; benchmarking; usage and financial profiles; parking capacity; on-street parking; aims and objectives for the parking service and key principles.

Attached to the report were a number of appendices, namely:

- Appendix 1 – List of car parks
- Appendix 2 – User research
- Appendix 3 – Tariff comparisons
- Appendix 4 – Car parking cost by town
- Table 1 – Draft Town Plans and recommendations
- Table 2 – Proposed tariff charges to leisure and community car parks

The recommendations of the Review Group were contained in Section 10 of report and tables 1 and 2.

The Chair invited Councillor David Palmer, Ward Member for Brandon West to address the Committee in respect of this item. Councillor Palmer thanked the Committee for allowing him to speak. His presentation to the Committee was backed by a petition to not introduce parking charges in Brandon. He explained that only 28 responses were received as part of the consultation in Brandon out of 10,000 residents. He felt there was no correlation with parking charges and the health of the town centre. Two shops had recently closed in the high street and there was no longer a bank in Brandon. Brandon was the most deprived town in West Suffolk. Councillor Palmer welcomed the provision for two electric vehicle charging points in George Street car park but believed any parking tariffs introduced would adversely affect Brandon and local residents by reducing footfall. He agreed that there was a need for more parking provision and investment in Brandon. There would be potential parking at the railway station, but this was not near to the town centre. He summed up by questioning the standardised approach to parking, and how many local businesses in Brandon were given the opportunity to take part in the consultation.

The Committee considered the concerns raised under public participation and by the Ward Member for Brandon West. It also discussed the recommendations in detail town by town, and made the following comments / suggested amendments, as follows:

Brandon

The Committee considered all the proposed recommendations, the two options as set out in Table 1 and the rationale for each option being put forward. The first option was to introduce charging in Brandon and the second option was to introduce a 3-hour time limit in the Bury Road car park, enforced by users being required to obtain a free parking ticket. The report also recommended Suffolk County Council to implement on-street paid parking in the high street at £1 for 1-hour.

Councillor Lukaniuk stated he was against any charging in Brandon. Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) would be implemented shortly, which would generate some income from illegal parking on double yellow lines in Brandon.

He felt that West Suffolk Council should be doing more to get Brandon out of poverty.

The Committee recognised the parking capacity issues currently experienced in the town. However, members acknowledged the concerns which had been raised about the potential impact that parking charges could have on the town and felt it would not be appropriate to introduce charging at this stage. As a result, the Committee preferred option 2 in the report, which would enable officers to monitor capacity and usage of the car park over the next year, and then review what impact the 3-hour time limit had had on the Bury Road car park.

The Committee considered the remaining proposed recommendations and in line with it not being appropriate to introduce charging at this stage in its car parks, it was suggested that the proposed recommendation to request Suffolk County Council to introduce parking charges on the high street be removed from Table 1.

Mildenhall

The Committee considered and agreed with all the proposed recommendations as set out in Table 1. In particular, it welcomed the proposed provision of installing two electric vehicle charging points in the Recreation Way car park.

The Committee further agreed that discussions with Mildenhall Town Council should be initiated as soon as possible to reach an agreement with regards to investigating opportunities to realise a cost neutral budget position on the operation of the Recreation Way car park, currently leased to West Suffolk Council by Mildenhall Town Council, as the lease was due for renewal in June 2021.

Haverhill

Councillor Tony Brown thanked the Review Group on its work in producing the report and subsequent proposed recommendations but would have liked to have had more electric vehicle charging points installed in Haverhill, particularly in the Arts Centre and Meadows car parks. The Committee recognised that the proposals included a general funding pot for electric vehicle charging points, some of which could be invested in Haverhill.

The Committee considered and agreed with all the proposed recommendations and tariffs as set out in Table 1 of the report.

The Committee also discussed whether the current "free from 3" parking should be retained on Fridays when the market was held. However, the Committee recognised that the financial implications of this would need to be tested and the Committee did not have this information to hand to do so. Therefore, as a result the Committee agreed to refer this proposal to Cabinet, who would be able to review the financial information and make a decision accordingly.

Bury St Edmunds

The Chair explained the reasoning behind the tariff increases in Bury St Edmunds and the car park zoning proposals. He then asked whether the Committee wanted to recommend to:

- Remove the £1 overnight charge from 6pm;
- Remove the 20p Ringo transaction charge. As a consequence, this would then need to be funded by the service at an estimated cost of £180,000 per annum
- Change the hours from 6pm to 8pm.

Members felt parking in Bury St Edmunds should be looked at separately. The free from 3 parking was currently in place to encourage people to go into town for the evening economy.

Discussions also took place on Ringo; whether the Ringo service could be renegotiated; other providers, and whether the Council could provide the service in-house, to which comprehensive responses were provided.

The Committee considered the proposed recommendations set out in Table 1 and concluded that all aspects relating to Bury St Edmunds should be referred to Cabinet to determine, subject to the following matters:

Having taken into account the feedback from public speakers and local members, the Committee debated the proposal to remove the current "free from 3" on Tuesdays. The Committee wished to explore options which could include retaining the "free from 3" on Tuesday, and potentially extending this period to midday on Wednesday. As with Haverhill, the Committee did not have the information to hand to be able to fully consider the implications, and therefore referred these proposals to Cabinet for determination.

The Committee considered retaining the tariff period to 6pm alongside the proposal to remove the night tariff of £1. The Committee supported the proposal to remove the night-time tariff but felt further financial information was required to fully assess the implications of retaining the tariff period to 6pm and therefore agreed to refer these matters to Cabinet for determination.

In response to a question raised regarding recommendations made by the previous Parking Review Group in 2015, when it was suggested a multi-storey car park was needed along with the necessary infrastructure in Bury St Edmunds, officers explained that work had been undertaken to understand peak time parking occupancy. A multi-storey car park would require significant investment. Therefore, the Council was looking at other options such as park and walk schemes.

Clare

The Committee agreed with the proposed recommendation to explore options for off-street car parking. Concerns were raised that the introduction of Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) could result in difficulties due to the lack of on and

off-street parking options in the Town. As such, the Committee felt the implementation of CPE needed to be carefully managed.

Newmarket

The Review group had decided not to provide a view on parking options in respect of Newmarket. This was accepted by the Committee. Therefore, Cabinet would need to determine its own proposals for the town.

West Suffolk (General)

The Committee considered in detail the proposals to charge for electric vehicle bays across West Suffolk. It recognised the Council had declared a climate emergency, and strongly encouraged the proposals to introduce more electric vehicle charging points across West Suffolk.

Members further discussed charging for electric vehicle bays at a concessionary rate, rather than the standard rate in short-stay car parks. It concluded that this proposal should be referred to Cabinet to consider the option of charging for electric vehicle bays at a concessionary rate rather than the standard rate.

In response to a question raised as to how much it cost to install electric charging points, and whether grants had been sourced. Officers explained that all current electric charging points had been sourced through grants but moving forward the Council would need to look at costs.

The Committee, having considered the proposals in respect of Haverhill and Bury St Edmunds had a wider debate on "free from" parking options. The Committee recognised there was a careful balance to be achieved between obtaining income from car parking to support the delivery of essential services in West Suffolk towns, whilst also achieving the Council's ambitions to support growth and local businesses. It suggested further work should be undertaken to explore "free from" options across West Suffolk towns, including the potential for all market towns to have a free parking incentive on markets days, which was raised under public speaking by Mr James Sheen as part of the We Love Bury St Edmunds petition. Therefore, the Committee agreed to refer this option to Cabinet to determine.

Table 2 (Proposed tariff charges to leisure and community car parks

The Committee considered and agreed with the proposals tariffs as set out in Table 2 of the report.

The Cabinet Member for Operations, Councillor Peter Stevens wished to thank the Review Group and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the work involved in producing the report and the subsequent scrutiny of this piece of work.

Councillor David Nettleton then moved the recommendations, these were duly seconded by Councillor Ian Shipp, and with the vote being unanimous, it was:

RECOMMENDED: That

The recommendations as set out in Section 10 and Tables 1 and 2, being the West Suffolk Parking Review Group's Report, attached as Report No: OAS/WS/20/003, be approved, subject to the following amendments/referrals being made:

- 1) Table 1: Brandon – no parking charges should be introduced in Brandon. Instead, a maximum stay of 3 hours is allowed in the Bury Road car park, with users required to obtain a free ticket. A review should be undertaken after 12 months to evaluate how this is operating.**
- 2) Table 1: Brandon – No recommendation be made to Suffolk County Council regarding parking on Brandon High Street.**
- 3) Table 1: Bury St Edmunds – That all aspects relating to Bury St Edmunds be referred to Cabinet for determination, subject to recommendation 4, 5, 6 and 9 below:**
- 4) Bury St Edmunds: Cabinet to be asked to consider the implications of retaining the "free from 3" scheme on Tuesdays and also consider the implications of extending it to include 8am to 12 midday on Wednesdays.**
- 5) Bury St Edmunds: Cabinet to be asked to consider the implications of removing the nightly charge from 6pm.**
- 6) Bury St Edmunds: Cabinet to be asked to consider the implications of retaining the tariff period to 6pm (from the 8pm proposal).**
- 7) Haverhill: Cabinet to be asked to consider retaining the "free from 3" on Fridays (subject to 9 below).**
- 8) Cabinet to be asked to determine its own proposals for Newmarket.**
- 9) Cabinet to be asked to look at the implication of "free from" parking options in all market towns across West Suffolk on market days (Fridays in Haverhill and Tuesdays in Newmarket).**
- 10) Cabinet to be asked to examine the electric vehicle bay charging structure across West Suffolk, with the potential to introduce charging for electric bays at a concessionary rate rather than the full rate.**

The meeting concluded at 8.30 pm

Signed by:

Chair