

REPORT
PARKING TASK & FINISH GROUP
SWAFFHAM

Summary

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 third phase of the Group's remit in that it relates solely to the town of Swaffham, and the investigation was undertaken from December 2010 to February 2011.

The Group met on four occasions, including one fully participatory public meeting in Swaffham.

The Group takes the opportunity to record its formal appreciation and thanks to all the stakeholders and agencies, and the officers and members of Breckland Council as well as the residents of the District for assisting in this wide-ranging review of car parking.

Introduction, Background and Methodology

A Parking Task & Finish Group was established under the direction of and reporting to the Overview & Scrutiny Commission in the summer of 2009.

The group comprises of: Shirley Matthews (Chairman), Philip Duigan, Diana Irving, Keith Martin, Derek Mortimer, Pauline Quadling, Brian Rose and Pam Spencer. The Scrutiny lead and project co-ordinating officer was Teresa Smith, and Jane Osborne gave administrative support to the review.

After completing the review on Attleborough (March 2010) and Watton (October 2010), the Group then turned its attention to Swaffham in December 2010. At the first meeting on the 3 December 2010 the group agreed the Terms of Reference (Appendix 1) and the Project Plan (Appendix 2). They held four formal meetings on the following dates:

3rd December 2010
17th January 2011
25th January 2011 (Public Consultation)
8th February 2011

As part of the review, information was sought from stakeholders within the town, a summary of which is attached at Appendix 3.

The Chairman of the Group and the lead officer promoted the review through press coverage and an interview was given to Wayland Radio on 25 January.

In January 2011, the lead officer together with Rory Ringer, Elections & Scrutiny Manager, undertook a site visit to familiarise with the car parks, and updated the notes the Members made in August 2009 from their visit (Appendix 4).

Parking Provision

Current parking provision is provided by both off street car parks and on street parking (see Appendix 5)

There is considerable on-street parking provided around the Town centre, and can be found on Lynn Street, the A1065, and the Main High Street.

Breckland Council owns six car parks in Swaffham; three of which have a 2hr short stay restriction on the Market Place, Pedlars and Pit Lane; and three long stay car parks at Lynn

Street, Theatre Street, and Station Street providing some 445 spaces. Appendix 6 illustrates their respective locations.

There is a small provision for disabled parking at Pit Lane, and outside the War Memorial.

Opposite Pedlars car park, there is a dedicated bay for a bus stop, and attached to this is a taxi rank, which is large enough for two vehicles.

Other off street parking is provided through private enterprise with supermarkets such as Co-op and Netto providing free spaces for their shoppers.

Policy Position and Finance

Breckland Council's long-standing policy in relation to charging for public parking in its car parks is that parking is provided free across the District. Historically the Council has recognised that maintaining the commercial viability of market towns through having a non-charging regime is the prime driver behind its policy position.

The consequent lack of income from car parking has meant that the available funding for car park upkeep and maintenance has been limited given the size of the overall budget. Members noted the relatively poor state of the surfacing in the Lynn Street car park, with substantial pot holes and uneven surfacing.

Issues

Issue 1 - Disabled Parking

At present, there are disabled spaces both at Pit Lane car park and outside the war memorial. However, it was brought to the Group's attention at the Public Consultation that this can prove awkward for disabled drivers, particularly on Market Day (Saturdays).

Recommendation 1

The Group recommend that the Council review the Disabled Parking, and provide easier access to spaces, perhaps the Market Place car park.

Issue 2 - Taxi Rank

There are two allocated taxi spaces at the bus stop. There are numerous times when there are more than two taxis waiting at one time, taking up space on the bus stop. Taxis can also be waiting in the Pedlars car park.

Recommendation 2

The Group recommends that Norfolk County Council – as the Highways Authority – undertakes an assessment to consider using the land opposite the old sixth-form centre, as a dedicated Taxi-rank.

Issue 3 – Signage

When entering the town from Mangate Street, the only signage for the town car parks directs traffic to Station Street car park which is out of town (illustration 1).

In addition to this, the main feedback received from the public was that the signs to the Theatre Street parking are very small, and do not direct people clearly to this car park (illustration 2). This could explain why the car park is notably underused, compared with other car parks in the town.



Illustration 1 - Sign from Mangate Street – directing traffic to Station Street parking



Illustration 2 - Theatre Street Sign

Recommendation 3

The Group recommends Norfolk County Council produce new, larger signs to entice people to park at Theatre Street.

Issue 4 - Management of Parking

There are three authorities who are responsible for the parking and enforcement within Swaffham. They are: the Police for yellow line and Disabled parking; Norfolk County Council for on street parking; and Breckland Council are responsible for the car parks. This in turn gives no coherent plan for the town to manage the parking issues.

Recommendation 4

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

Issue 5 – Enforcement & Charging of Parking

A Traffic Warden is employed by Swaffham Town Council two sessions a week, however this still does not deter the public from parking beyond the two-hour restriction.

There are on-going discussions between the five market towns to employ a Traffic Warden. A Traffic Warden would patrol the towns, issue parking tickets when appropriate which would deter the public from parking beyond the current restrictions.

This could lead to the introduction of 30-minute spaces, as this could be enforced.

Charging remains an emotive and politically sensitive issue, especially in the current economic climate. From the consultation undertaken there was no enthusiasm to introduce a charging regime and the Group endorsed this position.

Recommendation 5

The Group supports the discussions by the Town Councils to employ a traffic warden to undertake off-street parking enforcement within the five market towns.

Recommendation 6

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

Conclusion

The Group has spent a considerable amount of time and effort in undertaking the review of parking in Swaffham.

The views of the public and stakeholders have been sought to 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 to medium term, and the recommendations are essentially un-costed, but in many cases will be of small or nil financial impact to the Council.

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 – Terms of Reference

Appendix 2 – Project Plan

Appendix 3 – Stakeholders views

Appendix 4 – Site visit observations

Appendix 5 – Schedule of Car Parks

Appendix 6 – Illustration of Car Parks

Overview & Scrutiny Commission

Parking Task & Finish Group

Terms of Reference

To understand and review the purpose of the car parking service provided by Breckland Council whilst taking full account of associated issues such as on-street parking and parking provided by retailers, in Swaffham.

The review should consider the following elements:

- Charging/non-charging (parking orders)
- Short and Long term parking
- Residents parking permits
- Enforcement resourcing
- Level and range of default fines
- Budgeting for the service – revenue and costs
- Access to and within car parks
- Physical condition of car parks – surfacing, marking of bays
- Signage to and within car parks
- Allocation of disabled bays
- Accommodation of coach and lorry parking
- Park and Ride

Aim

Through evidenced based assessment and evaluation, baseline information, site visits, stakeholder input and other relevant methods, to produce a report with recommendations as appropriate for each town to the Overview & Scrutiny Commission.

Overview & Scrutiny Commission**Parking – Task and Finish Group****PROJECT PLAN**

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Project Title | Review of Car Parking in Breckland Towns (Swaffham) |
| Project Manager | Teresa Smith / Rory Ringer |
| Project Background | At its meeting on 26 March 2009 the Overview & Scrutiny Commission agreed that a task and finish group be formed to undertake a review of on and off street car parking in all five Breckland Towns. |
| Project Objectives | To establish if any improvements can be made in respect of the car parking provision to Breckland residents, businesses and visitors. |
| Project Outcomes | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To establish the policy position in relation to off-street and on-street parking and identify any improvements in how the service is delivered, taking account of on-street parking and retailer provided parking. 2. The Task and Finish Group will undertake the review and report its findings and recommendation through the Overview & Scrutiny Commission and the Cabinet |
| Scope | Review of Car Parking in Breckland towns. Attleborough and Watton having already been completed. |
| Key Milestones | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. First Group meeting to agree Terms of Reference and consider baseline information – 3rd December 2010 2. Site Visits – January 2011 3. Promotion of the review via local media – Dec - January 4. Consultation (Public Meeting) – 25 January 2011 5. Meeting with Stakeholders (<i>include in public consultation</i>) 6. Draft Report to Parking Group – February 2011 7. Final Report produced – 24th March 2011 |
| Background Research | Council Policy, Best Value Review of Car parking (2001), Post BV Review Action Plan, agency agreements covering enforcement, information showing location of council car parks, short term parking orders, and maintenance budgets/spend revenue and costs. |
| Resources | TS/RR will co-ordinate the review. Additional resource will be required from Member Services to provide a clerking service for meetings of the group. A lead officer from Asset management team to provide technical/specialist knowledge and contribute by attending meetings as required. |

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| Possible witnesses and consultees for the review | Rep from local chamber(s) of trade Norfolk Constabulary Norfolk County Council Asset Manager (Breckland Council) Corporate Project Manager (Breckland Council) Rep from local taxi and bus operators Reps from Town and relevant parish councils Reps from major retailers Other Norfolk local authorities |
| Possible site visits | To inspect Swaffham Car Parks |
| Possible Consultation Methods to be adopted | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To possibly undertake sponsored research through a survey to be undertaken in Swaffham. 2. Hold public meeting in Swaffham with invites sent to local town and parish councils and other relevant stakeholders. |

Parking in Swaffham
Summary of Stakeholder views

Norfolk Constabulary

- Theatre Street Car Park – well kept, but not as well signposted as it could be.
- Loading bay nr McColl's shop – often abused by cars and HGV's having to park on road.
- As parking is free, this attracts large number of visitors to Swaffham which is good for the local community.

Public responses

- Marvellous place the town is for parking. No fiddling for 50p for 30 minutes in pouring rain. Long may it continue!
- Access & signage for Theatre Street is dreadful.
- The bus stop is also in-front of the only taxi rank in the town. The 1-2 spaces allocated for taxis is now insufficient. In addition to this there can also be up to 3 buses parked at the same time, therefore sticking out onto the main road. Solution could be to allocate whole area to bus parking. Then taxi rank could be allocated in-front of old Hamonds High School.
- Lack of enforcement – there are 2hr restrictions, but as no enforcement leads to parking for long hours or all day.
- Theatre Street parking needs to be better signposted. In addition, better overall signage is required, especially for the visitors who do not know the town.
- To charge for parking, as long as fee is reasonable – this would raise much needed funds.
- Perhaps if spaces were marked in herring-bone-fashion this would make parking a lot easier for drivers.
- Issues of parking at Primary School on the White Cross Road. It has increased size over last 18 months, therefore more parking & illegal parking on double-yellow lines on regular basis. Including at bottom of Beech road causing issues to get to the Drs and community centre. Situation has got worse with more people parking on busy road. Would like full double-yellows on the White Cross Road, and warning signage.

Necton Parish Council

- Against implementing any parking charges in Swaffham. Local businesses are struggling in difficult economic times and putting parking charges in will impact on people using Swaffham as a local shopping venue.

Narborough Parish Council

- Adequate spaces but the need for a few more disabled spaces was identified.
- Surfaces, lighting and markings are all ok.
- The 2hr short stay is fine.
- Current levels of enforcement are adequate and because parking is free there is no major problem with inconsiderate on-street parking.
- The introduction of parking fees would be counter-productive: this would encourage those from the villages to cut their losses and go to Lynn, Dereham or Downham.
- The long stay parking at Theatre Street could be better signed.

Observation Sheet – Swaffham Parking

| Location | On/Off street | Status | Parking Spaces | Comments | Observations |
|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Lynn Street | Off Street | Long Stay | 21 | Free, surfaced car park | Not well signposted – signs in poor condition with green-mildew and faded. Pot-holes, surface in poor condition. |
| Market Place | Off Street | Short stay – 2hrs | 62 | Free, surfaced car park | This was a good and well marked car park. Lighting and CCTV. |
| Pedlars | Off Street | Short stay – 2hrs | 18 | Free, surfaced car park | Good car park and well marked out. CCTV & lights. No Disabled spaces. This is opposite a taxi rank with only 2 spaces, and a bus stop. This is the main bus stop in the town, and National Express stop through. |
| Pit Lane | Off Street | Short stay – 2hrs | 6 | Free, surfaced car park | Very small car park – with 2 disabled spaces. |
| Theatre Street | Off Street | Long Stay | 305 | Free, surfaced car park | Good, well marked out car park. Well lit and CCTV. The signage to this is very poor from the main town centre. |
| Station Street | Off Street | Long Stay | 33 | Free, surfaced car + lorry park | Coaches also park here. Well laid out car park with CCTV. |

General Comments:

Coming from old A47 route into Swaffham, there was no signage at the main traffic lights to the car parks in the town, except for the one at Station Yard. As a visitor to the town, you wouldn't know about the other car parks.

At the taxi rank in front of the main bus stop, there was only space for 2 taxis. A recommendation would be to extend a taxi rank somewhere around that area.

Observations carried out by Teresa Smith & Rory Ringer 14.1.11

Parking Spaces in Swaffham Town centre

The schedule below shows a breakdown of information on parking spaces in Swaffham town centre and has been sourced by information held by Breckland Council and through site visit.

Schedule of Parking provision within central Swaffham

| Location | On/Off street | Status | Parking Spaces | Comments |
|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Lynn Street | Off Street | Long Stay | 21 | Free, surfaced car park |
| Market Place | Off Street | Short stay – 2hrs | 62 | Free, surfaced car park |
| Pedlars | Off Street | Short stay – 2hrs | 18 | Free, surfaced car park |
| Pitt Lane | Off Street | Short stay – 2hrs | 6 | Free, surfaced car park |
| Theatre Street | Off Street | Long Stay | 305 | Free, surfaced car park |
| Station Street | Off Street | Long Stay | 33 | Free, surfaced car + lorry park |