

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL 13TH MARCH 2007
(SERVICE SUPPORT)
CABINET 15TH MARCH 2007

TOWARDS A CAR PARKING STRATEGY FOR THE MARKET TOWNS
(Report by Head of Planning Services)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is for Members to consider the initial findings of the report by the Council's consultants Steer Davies Gleave (SDG), who were appointed in May 2006 to undertake this review.
- 1.2 Members will be asked their views on the setting-up of a working party of Members and Officers to develop a Strategy and Action Plan for the provision and management of car parking within the District's Market Towns.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Members will recall that the current Huntingdonshire Car Parking Strategy 2005-2016 was approved by Cabinet in October 2004. As a result, a revised regime for off-street car parking was introduced, together with revised charges, in June 2005. Revised on-street charges have yet to be implemented.
- 2.2 The current adopted Strategy covered a range of issues with respect to car parking and not just on and off-street arrangements. It also covered issues such as parking standards relating to development and the forecast of likely delivery of private sector development including additional car parking capacity.
- 2.3 Our current strategy provides for the charging policy to be reviewed at intervals of no more than three years. Given that new charging levels were introduced in the first-half of 2005, the next review would therefore fall to be considered in 2008.
- 2.4 The need for this review of our Car Parking Strategy is dictated by a number of emerging issues;
- The need for up-to-date evidence of the requirements for car parking in the Market Towns and the need to consider possible locations to meet future needs

- Recent Vision, Spatial Strategy and Action Plans. For Huntingdon Town Centre, this identified that parking needs are a fundamental issue in maintaining the viability of the town centre
- Slow take-up in developing retail opportunities in Huntingdon than were previously thought that would have provided additional public car parking spaces
- Planned redevelopment of major sites with potentially less replacement parking. This is particularly relevant in Huntingdon
- Increasing provision of residential development within town centres in accordance with government policy and the consequential impact of additional demand for parking on-street or within public car parks

2.5 As part of our existing strategy, a key issue in the consideration of additional parking provision, is the ability of the Council to potentially find land appropriate for that purpose, in the right location and to fund such provision. The existing strategy therefore identifies the need to continue to work with development-related schemes to secure additional parking provision, as well as within our own portfolio, to meet anticipated needs.

2.6 An example of this issue is within Huntingdon where a partnership was anticipated with town centre development at Chequers Court where our MTP was developed to deliver additional anticipated capacity in accordance with the developer's indicative timetable. The previous strategy had also highlighted the need for the early delivery of long-stay parking at Riverside and a vacated Godmanchester depot.

2.7 Additional parking provision at Riverside has been reconsidered and the planning application to extend the car park has now been withdrawn. Opportunities exist to reconfigure the car park and to provide better arrangements for long and short-stay users, within an enhanced Riverside Park and Leisure area if desired. As Members will know, while negotiations continue to secure new retail developments in Huntingdon town centre, the delay in the delivery of this new development has resulted in the failure to deliver any major additional car parking capacity. Options to utilise the vacated Godmanchester depot for car parking are on-going.

2.6 Due to pressures on finding suitable land for car parking and the high associated land values for acquisition, it is likely that the Council will continue to have to explore this type of potential partnership in association with development opportunities as part of this strategy review, as well as considering the use of land within our control.

3. PROGRESS WITH REVIEW OF STRATEGY

- 3.1 SDG have been undertaking a policy review of all national, regional, county and district parking policies that will influence and support the review. This includes considering a diverse range of subjects such as air quality management, town centre development opportunities and housing provision. While the range of advice is diverse, the common theme is to provide adequate accessibility and the review must have due regard to the whole range of these applicable policies.
- 3.2 In tandem with this work, SDG have also been undertaking a related review of Council parking data (collected as part of our own monitoring regime), updating the work done in 2004 and carrying out validation surveys of usage and capacity in all town centre car parks prior to the school holidays in the Summer of 2006.
- 3.3 An Officer Working Group has been overseeing this work and this has included representatives of the County Council in their role as local highway authority and the body who currently control on-street parking policy.
- 3.4 A requirement of the Consultant's work has been to undertake Stakeholder Briefings with representatives from within and outside the Council to ensure full community engagement in the process and these were undertaken in October and December. The primary objective of such briefings was to provide information to those attending, particularly on the current situation, to request information and feedback, to achieve a consensus view and support for the aims of the strategy and to understand perceptions of problems and issues.
- 3.5 Stakeholder events were held in each Market Town and the key issues raised are as follows, broken down on a town by town basis. As will be seen from the information in Annex A, while there are common themes to be addressed, there are also individual issues specific to each town. It is therefore likely that for any strategy review to be fully effective, it will have to address this diverse range of issues.
- 3.6 At each consultation event, SDG outlined three broad strategic approaches that could be explored to manage future parking needs;
 - Expansionist – building more spaces to meet increased car parking demand
 - Balanced – use pricing to keep demand at current levels and improved signage to improve parking distribution and encouraging different travel choices in the future

- Demand Management – control pricing and supply to reduce parking demand and supply below current levels and encourage shift to other modes of transport

3.7 For each workshop, SDG outlined the results of their survey work, current capacity issues and the three approaches to be considered as 3.6 above. Feedback from those workshops for each town is attached at Annex A.

4. OTHER RELEVANT FACTORS

4.1 The results of the public consultation exercise undertaken in conjunction with the Huntingdon Town Centre Vision were reported to Cabinet on 9th November 2006. As Members will have noted, there are many common themes emerging from that work and the issues that are now emerging through the car parking strategy, including;

- Support for more car parking
- Better places for car parking than Riverside Park. Other options should be explored before deciding to extend at Riverside
- Has Park & Ride been considered or Park & Walk ?
- Increase car parking at Chequers Court
- More short-stay parking
- Long-stay parking should be provided outside the defined town centre

4.2 In developing future options and recommendations for car parking in Huntingdon, it is clear that this will need to tie into the Centre Vision work.

4.3 A further issue that will need to be considered within any overall work across the District would be the extension of decriminalised parking enforcement (DPE) within Cambridgeshire, which currently operates only within Cambridge and Peterborough. This is where the control and enforcement of on-street parking would no longer be undertaken by the Police but would become locally administered at District level across the County.

4.4 While there is an over-riding aim of achieving better enforcement as a result of DPE with particular benefits leading to better town centres, there is a bigger picture to consider and a balance needs to be struck. Key issues emerging for Cambridgeshire include;

- If introduced, DPE would apply District (and County) wide and would include all towns and villages
- What levels of enforcement would apply across different areas?
- Would partial introduction of DPE undermine remaining Police enforcement regime?
- Would DPE be managed using District Council resources or would external contractors be appointed?
- What are the financial arrangements?

4.5 In their role as local transport authority, the County Council have just commenced a series of meetings with District Council's to discuss the options but it is clear at this stage that this will also need to be carefully linked to the District Council car parking strategy to ensure that it does not become out-of-date if DPE were to be introduced.

5. CONSULTANT'S RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 SDG have now submitted their Final Report, which details the process by which they have made their recommendations on how a Parking Strategy should be developed for each of the market towns, together with key recommendations on the approach to take in each town. This includes the consideration of the overall issues in relation to parking under five key categories namely supply, location, price, quality and control.

5.2 The profile for each town includes the expected short, medium and long-term recommendations and outcomes and can be found in detail at Annex B.

5.3 A specific issue for Huntingdon, St. Neots and St. Ives is the recommendation that over a period of time, charges for long-stay parking should be introduced or applied consistently. The report highlights that there is a perverse differential between cheap or free all-day parking when compared to the price of day pass bus tickets. As well as meeting some immediate parking needs, SDG recommend that the Council should aspire to enacting a travel demand management policy by conferring a modal benefit to buses by the introduction of such charges.

5.4 Key recommendations made by SDG are briefly as follows;

5.4.1 Huntingdon –

- The need for immediate provision of short-term parking and the longer term balance of parking with the introduction of long-stay charging with an increasing scale of charge
- Provide 165 spaces within ring-road in the short-term, subject to land availability. Decking options at Sainsbury's and Princes Street. Together with long-term options, Mill Common is suggested to be re-designated from long to short-stay
- Long-stay parking provision at Bridge Place (Depot) and/or Brampton Road. Re-designate Mill Common to short-stay
- Park & Ride, while popular with stakeholders, unlikely to be economically viable at present
- Improved signage to all car parks to aid visitors and reduce search space
- Improved control/enforcement, particularly options around on-street parking to ensure parking is not shifted to residential streets which have been subject to previous investigation/representation

5.4.2 St. Neots –

- To cater for peak market day demand, a small increase of 50 short-term spaces and the longer term balance of parking with the introduction of long-stay charging with an increasing scale of charge
- Options for expansion are identified at Tebbutts Road by provision of decking. Cambridge Street is also identified for expansion, albeit further from the town centre. Riverside is not seen as an ideal location for expansion given its location. The lack of a suitable site for car parking on the south side of the town centre is a key issue. Re-designation of car parking within the town centre from long to short-stay is also identified
- Park & Ride, while popular with stakeholders, unlikely to be economically viable at present.
- Improved signage to all car parks to aid visitors and reduce search space
- Improved control/enforcement

5.4.3 St. Ives –

- If restrictions were to be placed on the Flood Arches at London Road, there may a requirement to consider a limited expansion in the town centre of around 30 spaces

- The proposed use of the Park & Ride site associated with the Guided Bus project needs to be determined and how this will impact on town centre parking. There appears to be a level of commuter parking within Cattle Market at present
- Parking within Market Hill is seen as having the potential to be removed once the effects of the Park & Ride site are known. This may allow pedestrianisation of the area to be considered
- The need to introduce a longer-term balance of parking with an immediate increase in long-stay charges and an increasing scale of charge over future years
- Improved signage to all car parks to aid visitors, reduce parking search and improve local congestion
- Control/enforcement is not seen as requiring any changes given general adequacy of parking supply

5.4.4 Ramsey -

- Parking availability is good with adequate supply to meet present and future demand. However location of parking is an issue requiring further consideration
- Free parking and the presence of just two small car parks at the centre of town results in high demand given their convenient location
- Any potential loss of off-street parking at New Road associated with redevelopment at 'The Grand' is of particular concern locally. While adequate overall capacity would still exist within the town, some on-street parking on Great Whyte is seen as remote, particularly to its northern end. Investigation into the expansion of parking at Mews Close by around 35 spaces needs to be considered
- Some local on-street parking problems on High Street and Great Whyte need to be explored in greater detail
- Given concerns relating to car park charging, specifically relating to the local economy, and that an adequate supply of car parking exists, there is no recommendation to re-introduce charging
- To manage off-street car parking, the introduction of a short and long-stay parking regime is recommended. This would specifically help to manage Mews Close and achieve a better use of under-utilised on-street parking in Great Whyte

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 The Officer Working Group has considered the work of SDG at some length and conclude that all the recommendations outlined in Section 5 and in more detail at Annex B, are worthy of further investigation. Of particular note is a tailored approach to future needs based on the specific requirements of each town rather than a more generic district-wide approach.

6.2 The range of issues raised are diverse and it is clearly apparent that any emerging Action Plan will need to carefully consider a structured programme of changes over the next few years. A financial strategy will need to be developed in partnership with the Medium Term Plan to ensure the recommendations can be properly programmed for future delivery.

6.3 Taking the recommendations of SDG and considering any immediate actions that need to be explored in the short-term and subject to funding availability, Officers consider that these are as follows;

6.3.1 Huntingdon –

- The provision of additional long-stay parking at Godmanchester depot following the relocation of Operations to Eastfield House in the second-half of 2007. This is likely to exceed the number of spaces recommended by SDG
- Possible introduction of long-stay parking at Brampton Road, opposite the railway station, in partnership with private development
- The introduction of long-stay parking charges on all car parks currently free of charge
- The re-designation of Mill Common from a mixed long/short-stay car parking to short-stay only and further investigation into decking options elsewhere, if demand dictates

6.3.2 St. Neots –

- The provision of a further 50 short-term parking spaces by decking options or the re-designation of town centre long-stay parking to short-stay and the extension of edge of centre long-stay parking
- The introduction of long-stay parking charges on all car parks currently free of charge

6.3.3 St. Ives –

- Discussions with the County Council on the future management of the Guided Bus Park & Ride car park to determine the impact on town centre car parking
- The increase of long-stay parking charges on all car parks

6.3.4 Ramsey –

- In tandem with development discussions at The Grand, to explore the extension of the Mews Close car park
- Subject to the above, to introduce a short and long-stay management regime for off-street parking

7. RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 At this stage it is recommended that the comments and emerging issues are noted and any feedback provided by Cabinet be incorporated into the emerging work.
- 7.2 It is now considered that it is necessary to take the Consultants Final report and recommendations, together with the conclusions contained in Section 6, and to develop a formal Car Parking Strategy and Action Plan during 2007. This will include reference to the Medium Term Plan and any proposed funding emerging from that work before this is brought back to Cabinet for formal approval.
- 7.3 It is also considered that a Working Party of Members should be constituted to develop the Strategy and Action Plan and the views of Cabinet are sought to this suggestion.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Huntingdonshire Car Parking Strategy 2005-2016
 Car Parking Study in Huntingdonshire 2006 – Consultants Brief
 Planning Policy Guidance and Statements
 Huntingdon Town Centre Vision – Cabinet report 9th November 2006
 SDG Market Town Stakeholder Feedback results – October 2006
 SDG Draft Final Report – January 2007

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