

## **Information for Cabinet Members to provide further background to the Service Support Scrutiny Panel's concerns with the car parking strategy report.**

We broadly welcome the report, and acknowledge the considerable effort of the Working Group Members in its production.

However Scrutiny exists to provide a constructive critique of policy and potential policy, and whilst our concerns have been neatly set out in the additional paper circulated to Cabinet Members, I felt it would be helpful to provide a little more 'meat on the bones'.

### **Low-emission vehicle discounts**

The Panel considers that HDC is uniquely positioned to encourage a shift in the levels of carbon emissions from vehicles operating in our district. It believes that it is unrealistic, given the rural location and relative affluence of many of our residents, to expect that a full shift away from the private car will ever be achieved. If we therefore believe that cars will remain in Huntingdonshire, we should encourage the use of technology that reduces the impact on the environment and air-quality.

We considered that offering the discounts only to season-ticket holders and residents firstly discriminated against the rest of the population. Obtaining a low-emission discount should apply to anyone using our car parks who has a qualifying vehicle.

Secondly, we considered that a discount of 25% would not be enough to actually encourage people to purchase a qualifying vehicle when they came to consider replacing their car.

We fully accept that very few vehicles achieve fall into the A emission brackets (although it is more than the 2 that was suggested – Vauxhall, Honda, Daihatsu, Suzuki and Smart). On balance, we felt that an eye-catching, financially valuable, easily remembered policy (e.g free parking for A rated vehicles) would be more likely to provide the incentive shift required.

It also has the advantage (for the time-being at least) of being the only such scheme in the country, considerably trumping Manchester's much-vaunted 25% discount.

We accept that it may be necessary to levy an administration charge, and possibly to provide trials to eradicate 'issues' from the scheme – however we believe that waiting 3 years for another review is too long to withhold full introduction a scheme available to all car park users. Vehicles obtaining free parking under the scheme would still remain subject to time-limitations and all other terms and conditions of use in the car-park used.

### **Time-related charges to deter commuters**

Our concern was that 9 hours would actually be bad for business in Huntingdon, where many people work regularly work for this length of time. It was also felt that most commuters were absent from their cars for a minimum of more than 10 hours, and generally in excess of 11.

### **Surplus income**

We have already committed ourselves to using surplus income (after the costs of administering and maintaining the car parks) to promote ‘integrated, sustainable and accessible’ alternatives to the existing arrangements. In the interests of good governance, the Panel believes this sum should be identified and its use clearly identified. The low-emission discount is one possible example of encouraging a sustainable alternative.

### **Park and Ride**

It was suggested at the Panel that a site near the Texaco garage at the junction with the A141 and the northern bypass was a potential site that provided links onto the guided bus. This would have the dual benefit of providing P&R access to either Huntingdon, or Cambridge.

It was accepted that the eventual route of the guided bus would utilise the existing A14 route, however the delivery time on this must now be assumed to be a minimum of 7 years from now.

An ongoing issue is how the Guided bus can be accessed by those in the hinterland of Huntingdon who for whom car access is the only realistic means of getting to a stop on the guided bus. The current arrangement of starting at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital, via the Bus Station and on to St Ives means that there is no effective way of connecting to it other than using town centre car parks. The 9 (or 10) hour rule to deter commuters would also then be affecting those who are using a sustainable form of transport to get to work and reducing strain on the A14.

If CCC are successful in obtaining the full £500m they are bidding from, it would seem sensible to try to obtain development of a proper P&R ‘node’ attached to Huntingdon with some of this funding.

### **Overspill into residential side-streets**

This was identified as a major priority by SDG, yet it features nowhere in the report. Peter Bucknell highlighted the resource issue of enforcement. He also pointed to the success of restriction initiatives such as that adopted in Scholars Avenue. However the Panel believed that, particularly to the immediate north of the Huntingdon ring-road and in the area around St Neots station, consideration ought to be given to creating residents permit zones, as the ‘hour in the middle of the day’ restriction would be unlikely to deter shoppers, and penalise homeowners. There is already strong evidence to show these roads are subject to such pressures, which the introduction of parking charges will only exacerbate. Whilst it is accepted that there are private drives on these roads, it has to be recognised that many estates and roads are struggling to contain the number of residents’ vehicles. As for enforcement, until de-criminalisation, what are PCSO’s for?

### **Residents’ Permits**

The Panel considered that at 11 pence per day, a £40 per year permit represented excellent value for money, compared with the charges that are being levied on people driving into Huntingdon. Firstly, it is questionable as to the cost-efficiency of this – can

we really provide parking facilities at 11p per car per day? Secondly, residents have access to other forms of transport – after all, the Government’s sustainability agenda is encouraging growth in market towns expressly because there are alternatives available to car use. Should we not be consistent in requiring residents to carry their share of incentive to ‘modal shift’? 11p (or even 22p) per day is not exactly doing this. It is fair to point out that a couple of Panel members believed that residents should park for free!

### **St Neots Riverside**

Peter Bucknell assures me that the motivation behind keeping this car park free came from a Huntingdon member, not as a result of lobbying from St Neots Councillors. In which case, we can continue the debate from a rational and independent standpoint! The issue the Panel has raised is one surrounding the treatment of long-stay parking (not leisure use). As St Neots has a shortage of spaces (albeit less of a problem than Huntingdon), the Panel considered it most unusual that a car park so close to the town centre was deemed immune from long-stay parking charges. We have appreciated, and agree with, a case-by-case approach to each Market Town. However as an independent Panel (we have 1 Huntingdon Member and 1 St Neots Member), we did not consider that this recommendation sent the right message regarding modal shift. It should also be considered that in Huntingdon, we are asking people using leisure facilities at their Riverside to pay short-stay rates. So it would appear that St Neots has a win-win situation, in spite of having an overall shortage of spaces. The complaint often seems to go up “Huntingdon gets everything”. In this case it’s parking charges!

I am not able to attend Thursday’s cabinet meeting, however would be happy to answer any questions this briefing note generates. My mobile number is 07796 446 037.

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