

CITY OF PLYMOUTH



EVENING, SUNDAY/BANK HOLIDAY AND DISTRICT SHOPPING CENTRE – PARKING CHARGES



Economic & Environmental Well-being Select Committee

July, 2003

'Overview and scrutiny is potentially the most exciting and powerful element of the entire local Government modernisation process. It places members at the heart of policy-making and at the heart of the way in which Councils respond to the demands of modernisation. In addition, overview and scrutiny is the mechanism by which Councils can achieve active community leadership, good governance and by which Councillors can become powerful and influential politicians.'

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: 'The Development of Overview and Scrutiny in Local Government', September 2002

CITY OF PLYMOUTH

Portfolio and Holder: Transport and Environment -
Councillor G. Wheeler

CMT Member: Director of Development

Subject: Evening, Sunday/Bank Holiday &
District Shopping Centre Charges

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 9th September, 2003

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Part: I

Executive Summary:

The purpose of this report is to inform the Cabinet of the outcome of the Economic and Environmental Well-being Select Committee's scrutiny of the decision to introduce charges for evening, Sunday/Bank Holiday and District Shopping Centre parking.

Strategic Choices:

These proposals are in line with the City Council's policy priorities to improve the local economy, improve the health, social well-being and safety of local people and continue to improve the City's built and natural environment.

Implications for Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications: Including finance, human, IT and land:

The proposals will put into practice a medium term financial plan to stabilise the budget position and create headroom necessary to redirect resources to policy priorities, recovery and improvement planning.

Other Implications: e.g. Section 17 Community Safety, Health and Safety etc.:

The proposals are in line with the City Council's commitment to Section 17 of the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act which requires the Council, without prejudice to any other obligation, to exercise the authority's various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its areas.

Recommendations & Reasons for recommended action:

The Economic and Environmental Well-being Select Committee recommended that -

- (1) the Cabinet invite the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Environment to consider the implementation of charges as advertised, and welcomed the promise of increased safety levels within the car parks;
- (2) insofar as long stay parking at District Centres was concerned, that Council Officers actively and positively explore partnership working with local employers of part-time workers and that this be undertaken within a reasonable timescale so as not to delay the implementation of charges;
- (3) the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Environment institute a review of all surface level car parks as time permits;
- (4) in reviewing future Council charges in accordance with established Council policy, the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Environment consider the relative competitive position of car parking charges in the region.

Alternative options considered and reasons for recommended action:

None.

Background papers:

Delegated Decision taken by the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Environment on 4th July, 2003 (ref. T+E 6 03/04).

Information provided by Officers (EEWB 10 03/04), viz:

- (i) Breakdown of information relating to City Centre car parks.
- (ii) Details regarding expenditure at Plymstock Broadway Car Park over the last 5 years.
- (iii) Clarification on the position regarding parking permits for the Co-op staff at Plympton.



REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC & ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING SELECT COMMITTEE

EVENING, SUNDAY/BANK HOLIDAY AND DISTRICT SHOPPING CENTRE – PARKING CHARGES

1.0 Background

- 1.1 At its meeting on 9th July, 2003, the Overview and Scrutiny Commission considered a request from the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Environment that scrutiny on his decision to introduce evening, Sunday/Bank Holiday and District Shopping Centre parking charges be conducted, so that any scrutiny recommendations could be considered alongside objections received when the proposals were advertised.
- 1.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission gave approval to the inclusion of this item in the work programme of the Economic and Environmental Well-being Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.3 The Economic and Environmental Well-being Scrutiny Committee subsequently agreed that a Select Committee be set up to look at this issue, and the Select Committee met on 23rd and 29th July, 2003, to consider the information available, as well as talk to Officers and invited witnesses.

2.0 Committee Structure

Councillors

Councillor Vincent, in the Chair.

Councillors Mrs. Aspinall (substitute for Councillor Carter), Bray, Hutchings, Dr. Salter and Wigans.



Officers in Attendance

- Paul Barnard - Transport and Planning Manager
- Brian Fossey - Parking Manager
- David Draffan - City Centre Manager
- Chris Randall - Finance & Accountancy Manager, Development Dept.
- Carole Hoyle - Democratic Support Officer

N.B. Chris Randall attended for the first meeting only.

Witnesses

For meeting on 23rd July, 2003:

- Councillor Wheeler - Portfolio Holder for Transport and Environment

For meeting on 29th July, 2003:

- James Carter - Joint Chairman, City Centre Partnership
- Sue Kennedy - Plymouth Chamber of Commerce
- Andrew Briggs - Chairman, Plympton Traders' Association
- John Crick - Union of Shop Distributive & Allied Workers (USDAW)
- Neil Forbes - Manager of major retail store, Plymstock Broadway
- John Shepherd - Independent trader, Plymstock Broadway

3.0 Objectives

The Economic and Environmental Well-being Select Committee -

- (i) consider the decision to introduce evening, Sunday/Bank Holiday and District Shopping Centre parking charges and determine whether:
 - (a) it was appropriate for the Portfolio Holder to instigate a process of consultation prior to consideration of the matter by the Cabinet;



- (b) the Council's financial regulations allow for income generated through off-street car parking charges to be used for any Council activity;
 - (c) this decision, if implemented, would be deemed equitable for all car drivers in Plymouth;
- (ii) forward its comments/recommendations to the Cabinet for deliberation alongside objections received when the proposals were advertised.

4.0 Detail

4.1 Meeting held on 23rd July, 2003

4.1.1 At the request of the Chair, Councillor Wheeler outlined the background to the decision taken by him as Portfolio Holder for Transport and Environment to -

- introduce evening, Sunday/Bank Holiday and District Shopping Centre charging at the earliest date after advertising;
- authorise Officers to advertise the proposals set out in the report accompanying the decision (EEWB 9 03/04);
- instruct Officers to report any objections to the proposals to the next available Cabinet after the end of the statutory 28 day consultation period, whereupon the Cabinet would decide whether or not to implement the proposals.

4.1.2 Councillor Wheeler advised that -

- (i) the decision had been taken in order to -
 - (a) fund the continued operation of Frank Cowl House, (formerly Granby Way Residential Home);
 - (b) fund crime reduction initiatives within the car parks;



- (c) reduce the impact of staff-related reductions amounting to £185,000 in the Transport and Planning Service;
- (ii) the proposals would also allow for the retention of low rate concessionary bus fares and the abandonment of the charges for disabled parking introduced by the previous administration;
- (iii) the present situation whereby District Centre car parks were run and maintained from the income received from the City Centre car parks was unacceptable and it was considered that these resources should be directed towards the funding of the significant works required to be carried out on City Centre car parks rather than free parking for car parks in other parts of the City;
- (iv) any comments/recommendations put forward by the Select Committee would inform the final decision taken by the Cabinet.

4.1.3 Having considered the information provided, members of the Select Committee raised a number of issues to which Councillor Wheeler and Officers responded as follows:-

- (i) the Transport and Planning Department was responsible for over 60 surface and multi-storey car parks throughout the City, all of which were being examined as to the appropriateness of their use;
- (ii) these would be looked at on a rolling programme, principally based on size, but there may be reasons for a particular car park being advanced up the list, e.g. if a partnership opportunity should arise;
- (iii) as part of the whole approach to Best Value and the C.P.A. process, Officers from Transport and Planning were working with colleagues from other Departments to determine the purpose and future use of a number of other car parks managed directly by those Departments;



- (iv) it was not intended to consult specifically with Area Committees on the advertised proposals, since it was not within their remit, but it was hoped that Ward representatives would make their views known through the consultation process;
- (v) that Officers met with the Police on a regular basis to discuss crime in car parks and it was hoped that future discussions would include the introduction of a number of crime reduction initiatives, although it was not possible to confirm what percentage of increased revenue would be expended on enhanced security measures in advance of knowing the extent of available funds;
- (vi) with particular regard to the proposals for District Shopping Centres -
 - (a) Plymstock Broadway, Plympton and Crownhill had been selected because they incurred the most expenditure as a result of the fairly vigorous enforcement regime which had been introduced in the past to deal with complaints from traders regarding the misuse of short stay spaces;
 - (b) the intention was to attempt to cover the operating costs to these car parks and, to go some way towards achieving that aim, the proposals were to charge for long term use;
 - (c) this should not have a detrimental effect on the viability of District Centres since shoppers would not be affected;
 - (d) the charges implemented would not exceed those advertised;
 - (e) it was possible that there could be a benefit for local traders/workers in that more long stay spaces might become available due to those who currently parked for free choosing to park elsewhere;



- (f) that the introduction of these charges would not lead to a corresponding reduction in the charges for City Centre car parks because there was still a requirement to fund ongoing maintenance and improvement works to the City Centre car parks;
- (g) it was hoped that the rolling programme for the introduction of charges would be completed by mid-October;
- (vii) there was no legislative reason why the surplus generated from off-street parking could not be used to subsidise other activities of the Council;
- (viii) that, although funding for the continued operation of Frank Cowl House could have been provided from the general car park reserve, this was not sustainable in the long term;
- (ix) it was estimated that the evening charges will raise £600,000 and a further £235,000 will be generated through the Sunday and Bank Holiday charges;
- (x) with particular regard to the proposals for Sunday/Bank Holiday charging -
 - (a) that when free parking was first introduced Sunday trading was in its infancy but it was now very well established with 40% growth over the last 2 years and Plymouth was currently the best performing trading location in the South West;
 - (b) that feedback from members of the Retail Forum, which comprised some 100 retailers, indicated that -
 - whilst they would prefer the continuation of free parking, it was felt that some element of charging was now sustainable;



- the level of charge should retain the competitive state with Truro and Exeter;
 - the increased revenue should be focussed on security measures and car park staff in order to provide a better service to customers;
- (c) that the views of shoppers were sought via a 6-monthly shopping survey but the next survey was not due until October.

4.2 Meeting held on 29th July, 2003

The following views were provided by invited witnesses:-

4.2.1 Feedback from Plymouth City Centre Partnership

- notwithstanding that it had only been possible to solicit the views of a small number of retailers on the specific proposals in the time available, the Partnership was aware that charges were to be introduced and the general feeling amongst members was that Sunday charging was inevitable bearing in mind the City Council's financial position;
- the current proposals were considered realistic and should not deter shoppers from visiting the City Centre;
- there could be a great deal of concern if these charges were increased in the future, especially if this compromised Plymouth's competitiveness with Truro and Exeter and this should be a benchmark for the future;
- retailers would be looking for the revenue generated to be spent on improvements to the service provided to car park customers.

4.2.2 Feedback from Chamber of Commerce

- free parking had been a significant factor in the success of Sunday trading in recent years and the primary concern of the Chamber of Commerce was that Sunday trading be protected;



- although it would prefer that charges were not introduced, the Chamber considered that any charges should be kept to a minimum in order to maintain Plymouth's competitive state.

4.2.3 Feedback from Plympton Traders' Association

- the results of a recent survey indicated that 40% of those people who parked in the long stay car parks in Plympton travelled from a different postcode or town and were therefore, to some extent, dependant on their cars, especially when there was no convenient public transport alternative, e.g. from Staddiscombe to Plympton;
- the introduction of charges could lead to a dramatic decline in the use of these car parks and it was therefore questionable whether the proposals would be profitable;
- the £2 charge for all day parking could compromise the viability of charity shops in the area whose employees work on a voluntary basis.

4.2.4 Feedback from USDAW

- there was concern that the charges proposed for long stay parking at District Centres would have a significant detrimental effect on workers in the retail trade who were predominantly low paid and often worked shift patterns of just under 4 hours per day;
- many people relied on their cars to accommodate differing shift patterns when public transport was not always available;
- there was an associated health and safety issue relating to late night/early morning shifts;
- that improved transport links, and a difference in culture, meant that there was a greater acceptance of the charging proposals from workers in the City Centre.

4.2.5 Feedback from Plymstock Broadway Store Manager

- proposals for District Centres would have a significant impact on his staff, 70% of whom were part-time and worked between 9-25 hours per week;



- shifts were between 3-3¾ hours and travel to work time was therefore a major consideration for workers;
- approximately 60% of part-time workers used their cars;
- that discussions regarding options for partnership working would be welcomed.

4.2.6 Feedback from Independent Trader at Plymstock Broadway

- have canvassed traders who have expressed concern that workers would be penalised;
- that it was considered that the income generated by the proposals would be far less than that projected;
- smaller stores would not be able to benefit from any partnership arrangement.

4.2.7 Having considered the information provided, members of the Select Committee and Officers responded as follows:-

- (i) that the Select Committee had been tasked with determining whether the decision, if implemented, would be deemed equitable for all car drivers in Plymouth;
- (ii) that, with regard to the expected income to be generated by the proposals, based on Officers' past experience with other car parks, a resistance factor of 25%-30% had been built into the figures;
- (iii) that Officers would be looking to set up a consultation group with traders to consider the current cross subsidy from City Centre traders to find a solution to offset the running costs of the District Centre car parks and it was envisaged that a partnership arrangement could be set up with these aims in mind.



5.0 Written Material

The Select Committee received the following written material to assist with its review -

- a breakdown of information relating to City Centre car parks;
- details regarding expenditure at Plymstock Broadway Car Park over the last 5 years;
- clarification on the position regarding parking permits for the Co-op staff at Plympton.

6.0 The Select Committee's Comments/Findings

With particular regard to the stated objectives, and on the evidence submitted, the Economic and Environmental Well-being Select Committee found that -

- (i) it was appropriate for the Portfolio Holder to instigate a process of consultation prior to consideration of the matter by the Cabinet and the scrutiny process had ensured that this had been open and transparent since there had been a clear indication of the five areas that would benefit from the income received;
- (ii) the Council was regulated insofar as how it may spend income generated from on-street parking as per Section 55 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. In accordance with sub-section (4) of this Act, a Council may only apply surpluses from the account for prescribed purposes such as the provision and maintenance of off-street parking. However, there are no transport legislative provisions which similarly regulate how surpluses generated from income received from the off-street parking account may be applied;
- (iii) on balance this decision, if implemented, should assist in the financial upkeep of these car parks.



7.0 Recommendations

Having considered all the evidence, the Economic and Environmental Well-being Select Committee recommended that -

- (1) the Cabinet invite the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Environment to consider the implementation of charges as advertised, and welcomed the promise of increased safety levels within the car parks;
- (2) insofar as long stay parking at District Centres was concerned, that Council Officers actively and positively explore partnership working with local employers of part-time workers and that this be undertaken within a reasonable timescale so as not to delay the implementation of charges;
- (3) the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Environment institute a review of all surface level car parks as time permits;
- (4) in reviewing future Council charges in accordance with established Council policy, the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Environment consider the relative competitive position of car parking charges in the region.

8.0 Minority Group View

The representatives of the Minority Group on the Select Committee indicated that they reserved the right to present a minority group view, which has been included as Appendix A to this scrutiny report.

**Economic & Environmental Well-being
Select Committee on Parking Charges**

Minority Group Recommendations

The Conservative (minority) group within the Select Committee has participated actively and fully in the scrutiny process, but despite lengthy consideration has reached a different set of conclusions from the same evidence. We therefore offer different recommendations, as follows:-

- (1) The proposed introduction of charges for long-stay car parking in district shopping centres should not be implemented, because of the adverse impact on small traders and significantly increased costs to local employees, particularly those who are low-paid. This burden on the vulnerable was a concern clearly voiced by USDAW, the shopworkers' union, and furthermore in our view would not be the best way to take forward Plymouth City Council's announced strategic priority to improve the local economy and the health, social well-being and safety of local people.
- (2) The proposed charges for evening and Sunday parking in the City Centre should also not be introduced. We believe that any such introduction would be a retrograde step which would reduce the vibrancy and vitality of the City Centre. As agreed by the Chamber of Commerce, the current policy of free Sunday parking in the City Centre has been greatly successful in terms of job creation and commercial development, and we believe this should not be put in peril.
- (3) Continued funding of Frank Cowl House should be sourced without an arbitrary and artificial link to car parking charges.
- (4) The Portfolio Holder should undertake much more extensive public consultation before proposing any increases in car parking charges. The small number (approximately 6) of City Centre shops consulted did not in our view represent an adequate sample, and the more than 4000 signatures protesting against the proposed charges across the City and districts testify to the strength of public feeling, especially because Cllr. Wheeler when questioned by the Select Committee would not rule out the possibility that his current proposal for long-stay charges might be extended in future to short-stay charges as well.
- (5) Initiatives to reduce crime and increase security in and near car parks are laudable and we support them, but we believe it would be imprudent to link this Council strategic priority to an untested revenue stream from car parking charges, especially when such anti-crime initiatives have not yet been planned or costed.

Cllr. Kevin Wiggins
Cllr. David Salter