

**EXTRACT FROM THE DRAFT MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 31 MARCH 2016 FROM 7.30 PM TO 8.45 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Keith Baker (Chairman), Julian McGhee-Sumner, Charlotte Haitham Taylor, Pauline Jorgensen, John Kaiser, Philip Mirfin, Anthony Pollock and Angus Ross

Other Councillors Present

Mark Ashwell
Prue Bray
Norman Jorgensen
Malcolm Richards

121. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

In accordance with the agreed procedure the Chairman invited members of the public to submit questions to the appropriate Members.

121.1 Chas Hockin asked the Executive Member for Planning and Highways the following question:

Bearing in mind the error in stating the reason for raising the car park charges, what confidence do I have in knowing that the council has made an accurate estimate of the numbers of people parking their cars in council car parks in the evenings and weekends? What figures did they use, how did they go about the assessment etc. I would like to see the figures that were used. (I am not against raising charges, but I am against raising charges in the evenings).

Answer

An evening and Sunday parking survey was carried out in late February 2016, which counted the usage of each of the car parks on a 2 hourly basis from 7pm-11pm Saturday evening and 6am-6pm on Sunday. The data was used to estimate the income from the proposed charges.

Evening charging is based on 10% of the average daily usage and Sunday charging is based on 50% of the average daily usage. Inevitably any income forecasts are an estimate as we cannot always accurately predict how users will respond. However from our experience of other charging changes we reflect that by putting in an element of resistance normally in our forecasts of around 10%.

Supplementary Question

Bearing in mind that in the responses listed to the objections you mentioned several issues and these are all cost related. You talk about the introduction of Parking Enforcement Officers, surely that is going to be a cost that will negate any profit that you make from raising the charges. Then you talk about on-street parking enforcement, that is obviously going to involve a cost to the detriment of any profit that you are going to make.

From my own personal aspect I think you have underestimated the social impact that you are going to have on raising these charges. I use the Woodley Town Council Oakwood

Centre and we get on very well with the Council there. I am a member of the Woodley Photographic Club and increasing the charges, not only with us but for other clubs, could have a detrimental effect on our usage of the premises and the attendance that we get. So I would like you to reconsider your proposal to introduce evening and Sunday charges and make it an increase in the daily rate.

Supplementary Answer

I understand what you are saying Mr Hockin. I have a number of other questions to answer and one of them does involve the car park in Woodley.

We have to make some pretty difficult decisions because of the cuts that we have had to take into the Council. We have had a large number of responses to the consultation and if somebody comes up with something that could supplement that or replace that income that we are likely to lose going forward we would always listen to it and I think you will hear as I answer some of the other questions that we have listened to the consultation and so I would ask you to bear with me and listen to the other questions.

121.2 Richard Dolinski asked the Executive Member for Planning and Highways the following question:

Woodley Town Council, The Town Centre Management Initiative (TCMI) and local business owners are very concerned that introducing a flat rate fee of £1 for Sundays and after 6pm in the evening will not achieve the additional income required from Woodley's car parks to balance WBC's books and deter visitors to the town centre. Recognising that additional income is required the Town Council and the TCMI suggested in its consultation response that it would be better to increase the hourly parking charge that has been frozen for many years under a Conservative led council from 70p an hour to 80p. This has multiple benefits in that the income from this approach would be extremely higher than the new evening and Sunday charges and is more acceptable to Woodley residents and businesses and demonstrates you have acted upon a consultation response. Would the lead Member support this for Woodley, in consideration of the concerns of businesses and the fear of those living in the town centre that drivers would simply park in residential roads?

Answer

An evening and Sunday parking survey was carried out in late February 2016, which counted the usage of each car park on a 2 hourly basis from 7pm-11pm Saturday evenings and 6am-6pm on Sundays. This data was used to estimate the income from the proposed charges and this was then compared with an estimate of income from increasing the hourly charge by 10p. The data showed that the evening and Sunday charges are most likely to increase revenue beyond what would be raised by increasing the hourly charge by 10p.

However I understand that there is an opportunity to be flexible about the car park charging regime across the Borough and there is no specific reason for absolute consistency in the charging structure; horses for courses basically. On this basis I am prepared to trial an increase in hourly charging in Woodley car parks in lieu of the evening and Sunday charging.

We will monitor this over the next 12 months and compare it with the income generated in other areas with a view to reviewing the overall charging regime at the end of the 2016/17 financial year.

121.4 Peter Must asked the Executive Member for Planning and Highways the following question:

The objections raised to the introduction of a £1 charge for evening, Sunday and Bank holiday use of Council car parks must be unique in coming from every sector of the local community: commercial and retail businesses, stall holders, events organisers, disability groups, heritage organisations and residents; leaving one to wonder what it takes, in a month where the Chancellor of the Exchequer has abandoned proposed cuts to PIPs because of public discontent, for the public of this Borough to persuade the Council not to proceed with a measure that is so widely opposed, so can Councillors please listen to the people and find some other means to raise this revenue?

Since you say if you can come up with any other suggestions please let us know can I assume that you will actually be allowing time before the implementation of these proposals if you do go ahead for those suggestions to come forward?

Answer

We did receive around 400 responses to the proposals for introducing evening and weekend parking and the vast majority were opposed to the introduction of charges and very few did suggest an alternative as we have seen for Woodley who did come forward with an alternative. All of these responses were read, and we did read all 400 of them, and considered in light of the pressure on the Council to find additional income and make savings.

All car parking income is used to fund the upkeep and improvement of the Council's road network. The cost of this service is largely dependent upon the cost of materials used, and of course they have all gone up in cost but the main is the cuts that we are actually enjoying; I guess you could describe it as that from the Government. Without finding additional income there are services that we would have to cut and those services would fall in a lot of cases on the weaker section of the population and would lead to a deterioration of the Borough's road network.

I did not come into this job to put up the prices, I am a Conservative, and I did not come into this to cut services to the most vulnerable. We are placed in a fairly difficult situation but I will take your recommendation away and discuss that with my colleagues with regards to what we do but please understand every month that ticks by means that money is not available for us to spend on the most vulnerable people who are in the Borough.

Supplementary Question

Can we be quite clear whether it is £1 for the limits of parking whether it is two hours or three hours that are normally imposed which is what I have been told by the Regeneration Team that a £1 will buy you two hours or three hours or whether it is a £1 for the whole period between the normal closure of the day time regime or the Sunday regime? Is it just £1 for the whole period or is it £1 for three hours, four hours or two hours?

Supplementary Answer

I am told it is £1 for the whole thing.

121.5 Keith Malvern asked the Executive Member for Planning and Highways the following question:

The Vision for the Borough is 'a great place to live, an even better place to do business' and that is followed in the Vision by needing to facilitate the regeneration of our towns. When Wokingham Town Council made their comments on the proposed parking charges they believed that '...with the regeneration of the town under way, this is not the right time to implement additional (parking) charges'.

Recognising that these proposed charges would have an impact on the regeneration what discussions have you had with Executive Member for Regeneration and the Regeneration Team about this?

Answer

The Regeneration Team and the Highways Team have to work very closely together, they work glove in hand as you can probably imagine and I am told by Matt Davey in Highways that he has spoken to the Head of Regeneration and he does not believe that this will have any impact on the regeneration of the town. In fact it would have a lot less impact than putting up the overall prices because of course the bulk of the business in the town is done during the day.

The regeneration of Wokingham Town will make it a more attractive destination and it is expected visitors will spend more time in the town during the day, at weekends and in the evenings. Daytime car parking charges in Wokingham Town have remained unchanged for several years and the day time charges again will remain unchanged this year. On balance the Council believes that the very small charge for parking all night and all day on Sunday will not have a negative impact on the attractiveness of the town as a destination.

Supplementary Question

Can I start by referring to your goodself as the Leader of the Council. You have said that "it is with deep regret that the Council has been forced to make these proposals". I would like to reassure yourself the Council has decided to make these proposals nobody has forced you to do it.

The advantage of any consultation, and we have had a consultation that has already been referred to with more than 400 responses, is that you are able to explain why you need it and you are able to explain what the likely revenue will be. This is somewhat difficult as you have explained today you have only recently done a survey of usage on Sundays. Never mind we move on. What alternatives have been considered and what can you see coming down the track?

Nowhere in the consultation document will you read anything about what alternatives have been considered. For example: trying to find more space in existing car parks particularly popular ones; increasing the current charges which have been referred to; increasing the subsidised charges for staff and Councillors and marketing initiatives. Luckily you have had some good feedback from hundreds of customers who have given their time freely to suggest alternatives; even I have suggested alternatives to you including the ones I have just mentioned. I will ask you whether you will take this opportunity to defer these charges. You referred to something happening in Woodley, but I couldn't hear what you were saying because you do not speak loudly enough. Whether you want to defer these Wokingham

changes until at least after the Station car park development has been completed and use the time to have a proper look at the helpful customer feedback you have already had?

Supplementary Answer

I would just reiterate that every minute, every hour, every day that goes by where we don't make these charges it puts huge pressures on other services in the Council and some of these services fall on the most vulnerable people in the Borough and as I said I did not come in to carry this role out either to increase prices or to take services away from the most vulnerable in the Borough.

Somewhere we have to decide that prices go up. I am sure Keith would like to tell you about the six months we spent talking about the budget at our Group meetings, examining everything even in micro detail and I would suggest that this is one of the things we need to do to generate the income to make sure the fabric of our roads continue to at least not deteriorate more than they have already.

The Leader of Council stated the following: The one comment I would say to you in terms of our pressure is just take Adult Social Care, which I am sure every one of us does not want to have reduced. Our growth just to stand still for next year is £2.4m. Put that in context 2% council tax rise is £1.6m so we still have to find £800k just to stand still so a contribution for this for repairing potholes etc has to be the way forward.

124. EVENING, SUNDAY AND SHUTE END CHARGES

The Executive considered a report setting out proposed Sunday and evening car parking charges which will ensure that the Council's off street car parks generate additional income and bring the Wokingham car park charging regime into line with many other authorities locally.

The Executive Member for Planning and Highways advised the meeting that the purpose of the report was to give authority to put the traffic orders in place to enable the implementation of the evening, Sunday and Shute End charges. Councillor Kaiser reminded Members that he had stated earlier in the meeting that the Council would be looking at variations to the proposals and would be mindful of suggestions put forward. He reiterated the financial difficulties the Council was facing which had been one of the reasons the proposals were necessary.

As set out in the report it was clarified that the proposals were for a £1.00 charge for parking all day (8am-6pm) on Sundays and bank holidays and Monday to Sunday nights (6pm-8am).

Councillor Mirfin queried when it was planned to have pay on exit at Council car parks and signage at the entrances to all the Borough's towns to show the availability of spaces? Councillor Kaiser stated that consideration would be given to these proposals; however financial implications also had to be considered. Councillor Pauline Jorgensen however requested assurance that the Council would not be spending more on car park barriers than was being made from car parking. A number of councils already used "RingGo" (a cashless parking solution) and that system, in conjunction with spot enforcement, could save money on capital outlay.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) approval be given to the permanent making of The Wokingham Borough Council (Various Off-Street Borough Car Parks) (Variation (2)) Order 2016);
- 2) Officers be instructed to amend signage and equipment in the car parks;
- 3) those who have responded to the consultation be informed accordingly.