

TITLE OF REPORT: LAIRAGE CAR PARK, HITCHIN - PARK AND STRIDE

JOINT REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF PLANNING, HOUSING & ENTERPRISE AND STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER SERVICES
PORTFOLIO HOLDER: CLLR TOM BRINDLEY

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks authorisation from Cabinet to commence a trial Park and Stride scheme at the Lairage Car Park.
- 1.2 Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) have agreed with the Council to meet the administration costs of this scheme.
- 1.3 HCC and the Samuel Lucas school require the Park and Stride scheme to be in place before they can start work on plans to increase the capacity of the school.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Cabinet authorises the Park and Stride scheme to commence at the beginning of the new school year in September 2013.
- 2.2 That Cabinet authorises the Council to enter into a legal agreement with HCC for the administration of the cost of the Park and Stride scheme.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To enable the Council to make effective use of its resources as owner and manager of the Lairage Car park in accordance with its policies in particular North Hertfordshire District Council's Parking Strategy 2009-2019 and the Hitchin Town Centre Strategy.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The Council could decide not to proceed with the Park and Stride scheme, however this will mean the Council will continue with the existing situation of vacant space on the top floor of this car park. In this event HCC would need to reconsider parking arrangements for Samuel Lucas School.

5. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

- 5.1 The Local Ward members have been consulted.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 Prior to making a planning application that was registered with HCC in April 2013 the Council were approached by Hertfordshire County Council in order to find out if the

Council would be in a position to assist with alleviating transport concerns that may arise from a proposed application to build extra classrooms at the School.

- 7.2 In particular the Council were asked if it would be appropriate for them assist with transport concerns by providing access to the Lairage Car Park to users of the School. The Lairage Car Park is currently a long stay car park.
- 7.3 Further to the request for assistance, the Council considered the possibility of operating a, "Park and Stride," scheme. Such a scheme would consist of providing a specific form of permit to parents of pupils at the Samuel Lucas school to permit them to park on the top floor of the car park only between the hours of 8.30am-9.30am 2.30pm -3.30pm.
- 7.4 It was envisaged that no more that 50 of these permits would be issued for the next school year, that the permits would only be valid during the school term, that the permits would only be valid for the top floor of the Car Park and that HCC would meet the cost of the administration of the scheme.
- 7.5 Officers were of the view that if it the Council was going to operate such a scheme it should do so on a trial basis for one school year in order to determine whether such a scheme would be a viable option.
- 7.6 The purpose of the scheme would be to alleviate potential transport congestion and safety concerns by providing an alternative place for parents to park when bringing their children to the School. The Samuel Lucas School is rated as outstanding by OFSTED and is recognised as a valuable asset to the community generally.
- 7.7 Surveys previously undertaken by the Council indicate that the Lairage Car Park is currently underused and calculations show that the proposed scheme would be cost neutral to the Council on the basis that none of the existing parking would be displaced. It is also anticipated that the proposed scheme would help to raise the profile of the Lairage Car Park and that permit holders may purchase tickets for additional time either before or after the permit times.
- 7.8 In order to determine the current level of usage of the Car Park random samples of the number of empty spaces on the top deck of the Car Park were taken at various times. A table of these samples is included below:

	Top Floor Empty Spaces At 9am	Top Floor Empty Spaces At 12pm	Top Floor Empty Spaces At 3pm
Tuesday	91	68	77
Thursday	97	82	81
Fri	98	84	85

- 7.9 In order to determine the level of usage of the Car Park generally random samples were also taken of the number of empty spaces on the 1st and 2nd floors of the Car Park:

	1 st and 2 nd floor Empty Spaces At 9am	1 st and 2 nd floor Empty Spaces At 12pm	1 st and 2 nd floor Empty Spaces At 3pm
Tuesday	50	13	31
Thursday	66	35	60
Fri	76	36	54

8. ISSUES

8.1 In order to assist in relation to transport concerns that may arise in relation to the School's planning application any assistance that the Council provides must be within the Council's capacity and must accord with its own policies. Following its own policies will ensure that the Council is making use of its resources in a clear and transparent manner and in such a way as to be in the best interests of the residents of the District.

8.2 Section 1(1) of the Localism Act 2011 provides that a Local Authority has power to do anything that individuals generally may do. Section 1(4) of the Localism Act provides that

Where subsection (1) confers power on the authority to do something, it confers power (subject to sections 2 to 4) to do it in any way whatever, including—

(a) power to do it anywhere in the United Kingdom or elsewhere,

(b) power to do it for a commercial purpose or otherwise for a charge, or without charge, and

(c) power to do it for, or otherwise than for, the benefit of the authority, its area or persons resident or present in its area.

8.3 The Plain English guide to the Localism Act 2011 provides that

The new, general power gives councils more freedom to work together with others in new ways to drive down costs. It gives them increased confidence to do creative, innovative things to meet local people's needs. Councils have asked for this power because it will help them get on with the job.

8.4 The Council's strategic Corporate Priorities are set out below

- Living within our means to deliver cost-effective services*
- Working with local communities*
- Protecting our environment for our communities*

8.5 It is the recommendation of officers that the Council enter into the Park and Stride scheme because the scheme will assist the well being of the local area in a way that is cost neutral to the Council and as such it will accord with the power contained in s1 of the Localism Act 2011 in a manner that is consistent with the Council's corporate priorities.

8.6 The proposed Park and Stride scheme also accords with the Council's Parking Strategy, as well as the Council's Hitchin Town Centre Strategy.

8.7 The Council's Parking Strategy states at paragraph 4.4:

Policy 1 - Management and Resources

In order to deliver this Parking Strategy the Council is committed to finding the most efficient and effective use of resources to implement improvements and manage the parking service on a day to day basis.

8.8 Transport Planning consultants employed by the Council to provide evidence for the Hitchin Town Centre Strategy have stated the following:

"Overall, the town centre car parks in Hitchin are seldom full; there is generally spare parking capacity somewhere and normally in the long-stay car parks".

This statement related to a study undertaken in 2002, however the situation has not changed and in fact has become progressively worse as a result of the current downturn in the economy. This is borne out by the figures provided in paragraph 7.9 which clearly demonstrate that the Car Park is currently significantly underused.

8.9 It is the view of officers that Lairage Car Park is currently underused and the proposed scheme would provide a more efficient use of a currently underused asset and as such would accord with the Council's Parking Strategy.

8.10 The recommendations relating to parking within Council's Hitchin Town Centre Strategy state among other things that the Council should review

"the balance between short stay and long stay car parking"

8.11 The proposed scheme would assist in providing some relatively short term parking to residents who are visiting the area in order to drop off their school children, it is the view of officers that the scheme will assist in meeting the above recommendation in the Hitchin Town Centre Strategy. Usage of the car park by parents of the school will be assessed during the trial period. This assessment will provide the information necessary to determine whether the trial period could be extended and whether, in overall terms, it supported the Council's Policy objectives in respect of the Car Parking, Hitchin Town Centre and Medium Term Financial Strategies.

8.12 As previously mentioned in this report the Samuel Lucas School is recognised as providing a valuable local service, the Council would be helping to support the town of Hitchin by providing this scheme. The Hitchin Town centre strategy states

The Vision for the Hitchin Town Centre Strategy is:

'To maintain the quality of the built environment based on its intrinsic historic character, and to develop an attractive, safe, accessible, vibrant and lively town centre for the local community and visitors to shop, work and live in'.

8.13 Members are asked to take into account the factors outlined above i.e. the efficient use of resources and the benefit to the residents of the Local Area and determine that proposed Park and Stride scheme is of benefit to Hitchin and as such authorised by the Cabinet.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Cabinet has within its terms of reference the power to set parking charges. This scheme will in effect set a nil charge for the limited time periods in which the scheme permits operate.

9.2 If adopted the Scheme as proposed will result in Cabinet accepting that potential income from permits should be written off because the Scheme will have wider benefits for the community generally. This is something that the Council is able to do under the general power of competence contained in s.1 of the Localism Act. Members are reminded that all decisions must be reasoned in a manner that is cogent and internally consistent as well as being in accordance with the Council's priorities and policies.

9.3 The off street Traffic Regulation Order that controls parking at the Lairage Car Park will not need to be amended as a result of this trial scheme.

- 9.4 Cabinet members are advised that any trial in relation to the scheme should be conditional on the implementation of any Planning permission that the School may have in relation to the new classrooms.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 HCC will be meeting the entire cost of the administration of this scheme and there will be no displaced parking. As such there are no budget implications from the proposed trial scheme.
- 10.2 There is a potential loss of income as spaces on the top floor will be taken up by cars that have been provided with a free permit. The random sampling figures indicate that the top deck of the car park is significantly underused and can clearly accommodate the spaces that will be taken up by the users of the proposed permit system.
- 10.3 Any impact on income has been mitigated by the limited operating hours of the proposed scheme.
- 10.4 It is suggested that data from the Lairage is kept under close review over the trial period in order to gauge the impact on income levels.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The Lairage Car Park is currently in use and no extra risk is envisaged as a result of the operation of the proposed scheme.
- 11.2 The Council considers the scheme to be cost neutral as HCC will meet the costs of administration, therefore there is minimal risk of loss concerning the administration of the scheme.
- 11.3 The Council would not normally provide free parking to a local organisation and as such the Council should be clear that this Park and Stride scheme is not a precedent for the Council to offer similar schemes to other bodies/organisations. However, it is within Council's powers to undertake a trial that will inform any future long term decision making.
- 11.4 In accordance with the financial implications above it is clear that this scheme is a trial the implications of which will be kept under close review.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 The Equality Act 2010 came into force on the 1st October 2010, a major piece of legislation. The Act also created a new Public Sector Equality Duty, which came into force on the 5th April 2011. There is a General duty, described in 12.2, that public bodies must meet, underpinned by more specific duties which are designed to help meet them.
- 12.2 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of its functions, give **due regard** to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.3 The scheme as proposed here has no negative equality implications.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 As the recommendations made in this report do not constitute a public service contract, the measurement of 'social value' as required by the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 need not be applied, although equalities implications and opportunities are identified in the relevant section at paragraph 12.

14. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 The scheme as envisaged will require minimal extra Human Resource to process the permit applications, however as mentioned previously HCC will recompense the Council for administration costs in relation to this application.

15. APPENDICES

- 15.1 None.

16. CONTACT OFFICERS

- 16.1 Vaughn Watson
Head of Leisure & Environmental Services
01462 474641
Vaughan.Watson@north-herts.gov.uk

- 16.2 Lorraine O'Gorman
Transport Policy Officer
01462 474425
Lorraine.o'gorman@north-herts.gov.uk

- 16.3 Jaspreet Lyall
Senior Lawyer
01462 474370
Jas.lyall@north-herts.gov.uk

- 16.4 Tim Neill
Accountancy Manager
01462 474461
Tim.neill@north-herts.gov.uk

17. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 17.1 North Hertfordshire District Council Parking Strategy.
- 17.2 Hitchin Town Centre Strategy.