

TITLE OF REPORT: HITCHIN TOWN WIDE PARKING REVIEW: TOWN CENTRE: INITIAL ISSUES

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLANNING AND ENTERPRISE MANAGER

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks the Area Committee's views on a number of parking issues affecting Hitchin Town Centre and for a potential town centre enhancement.

2. FORWARD PLAN

- 2.1 This Report contains a key recommendation that was first notified to the public on 1st June 2009 for the NHDC Car Parking Strategy Review.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Area Committee recently agreed its priorities for the 2011/12 Parking Review. One of the priorities was a review of town centre parking.
- 3.2 As part of the Review, consideration of on-street charging is supported by the Parking Strategy (see Policy 9) and this report begins to explore this issue.
- 3.3 Officers have been working with Hertfordshire Highways (HH) to consider potential for a small to medium sized enhancement scheme in the town centre. This could be delivered by potential Growth Area Fund, Local Transport Plan (LTP) and S106 monies and would be subject to the Corporate Business Planning process.
- 3.4 As part of the Council's 2010/11 Corporate Business Planning, proposals to introduce Sunday, evening and Bank holiday charging in NHDC car parks were agreed in principle. This report contains an update on these proposals.

4. ISSUES

Town Centre Parking Review

- 4.1 Officers are unaware of any significant demand for changes to or additional demand for on or off-street parking in Hitchin. The Area Review offers the opportunity to consider whether:

- additional parking space is required and where

- durations of short stay on street need amending
 - yellow line restrictions need implementing/amending
 - provision for disabled badge holders, loading and taxis needs amending
 - provision for bicycles and motor cycles needs improving
 - any other parking related issues
- 4.2 As part of the Area Review the Committee has already supported the potential extension resident of permit parking and provision of some short stay parking in Wratten Road East/Old Charlton Road. The short stay element would help to support businesses in that part of the town centre.
- 4.3 In Biggin Lane, parking occurs on the highway/NHDC land adjacent to the market and alongside the River Hiz on non-market days. Traders also park at the rear of market stalls on Market Days. The nearby Biggin Lane car park is often underused as a result. It is suggested that the parking at the rear of the stalls is formalised into short stay (non market day)/permit holders (market days). This proposal is also discussed at 4.11
- 4.4 The Committee's views on town centre parking generally are welcomed with a view to taking any agreed proposals forward via the Area Review.

On-street charging

- 4.5 NHDC's Parking Strategy (Policy 9) also refers to the need to consider on-street parking as part of Area reviews. There is currently no on-street charging in any of NHDC's town centres though a number of charged on-street bays will shortly be introduced in Royston.
- 4.6 The Committee will be aware of the considerable costs the Council incurs in managing on-street parking. The only income from this being resident permits and Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs). The main demand for management comes in town centres, however. The most frequent cost of maintenance of signs and lines also occurs in town centres.
- 4.7 Off-street charges have increased over several years to the extent that the gap between on-street (free) and off-street (charged) may offer incentive for people to avoid paying for off-street. The effects of this may be increased circulation of traffic looking for free spaces, staying beyond on-street parking duration, abuse of disabled and loading bays and parking on yellow lines.
- 4.8 One benefit of on-street charging is that display of a ticket makes enforcement more efficient and this should assist the turnover of spaces which makes on-street parking space more available.
- 4.9 The Pay by Phone service plus other cashless payment options removes the need for parking payment by cash. Methods of pre-payment are also available (e.g. scratchcards).
- 4.10 Town centre businesses and users will be very sensitive to any charging so if it is to be considered a phased approach would be the suggested way forward. There are many issues to bear in mind. These include:
- Should there be any on-street charging?
 - Should charging be in all town centre streets?
 - Should charging initially be in the core, higher demand/higher turnover streets?

- Should charging initially be in the peripheral/non-retail frontage/lower turnover streets?
- Should charging offer an initial free period (e.g. up to 30 minutes free, up to 1 hour 50p)?
- Should charging be a flat rate regardless of duration permitted?
- What are the implications for non-town centre streets?
- What are the implications for off-street car parks?

4.11 At this stage it is suggested that Portmill Lane, Biggin Lane, Hollow Lane, Queen Street and Park Street be considered for on-street charging. All are locations close to pay and display car parks and none are in the core shopping streets. Charges could be a single flat rate 50p for the maximum duration allowed and should mirror the off-street chargeable days.

4.12 Analysis of use of any on-street charging will help inform any subsequent phases.

4.13 The Committee's views on on-street charging are welcomed with a view to taking any agreed proposals forward via the Area Review.

Potential Town Centre Investments

4.14 Officers have recently liaised with Hertfordshire Highways (HH) about the potential use of LTP and S106 funding on transport schemes in Hitchin. One idea that has been put forward is a small to medium scale town centre enhancement of some form.

4.15 Any enhancement proposal is likely to have implications for parking so it is appropriate to begin discussion on this issue alongside the Area Review.

4.16 NHDC and HCC have a good track record of delivering enhancements in the district with recent examples being completion of a major scheme for Baldock and the scheme nearing completion in Royston at Fish Hill.

4.17 The potential to boost the attractiveness of the town centre, especially for shoppers and retailers may be considered appropriate for current economic circumstances.

4.18 The Committee will recall the proposals suggested in the Urban Transport Plan for Hermitage Road which has formed the start point for discussion with HH.

4.19 Consideration of potential budget available and informal liaison with HH and the Town Centre Manager suggests that enhancement of Hermitage Road may be beyond resources, too sensitive in terms of disruption to traders and a risk in relation to uncertainty about the Post Office site.

4.20 Officers are discussing options with HH for the use of LTP/S106 funding. These discussions remain ongoing and in the event that funding is available and early input from the Committee is welcomed.

4.21 Members' views are requested on the type of scheme that they may wish to support (subject to funding) in order that this can be progressed through the Corporate Business Planning process.

Sunday, Evening and Bank Holiday car park charging

- 4.22 Following the completion of the 2010/11 Corporate Business Planning process, the Council agreed to consider the principle of charging in NHDC controlled off-street car parks on Sundays, evenings and Bank holidays.
- 4.23 A new draft off-street car parks Order has been advertised which included a statutory consultation period.
- 4.24 44 objections and c287 petition signatures were received in relation to Hitchin out of a total of 65 objections and c1800 petition signatures district-wide.
- 4.25 Officers are currently analysing objections and have just undertaken survey work on Sunday and Bank holiday usage. A report will be prepared for the November meeting of the Area Committee but any initial comments from the Committee would be welcomed.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Area Committee terms of reference include providing input into centrally determined specifications for all services and to consider the policies and actions of the Cabinet as to their appropriateness to the needs and aspirations of local communities.
- 5.2 The Council's agreement with Hertfordshire County Council gives the Council powers to create Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) for on-street parking management. All of the parking related suggestions in this report will require TROs to be made, including any associated with off-street car parks and enhancements (the latter would be prepared by HH).
- 5.3 Any proposals for changes to parking management and enhancements will need to be agreed with Hertfordshire Highways and the Police.
- 5.4 The Council will be required to follow regulations on creating TROs including consulting all statutory bodies and considering any objections from the public.

6. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The main potential financial implications arise from the need for the Council to work within increasingly tight financial constraints and not incur additional, excessive costs. Enforcement resource will also need to be in place as a result of any new proposals and it is recognised that considerable costs are incurred by the Council in managing on-street parking.
- 6.2 Preparing parking related TROs, plans and supporting documents will be done in-house. All costs of preparation work and consideration of objections then implementing any subsequent signs/lines will be met from existing revenue budget.
- 6.3 Any potential enhancement scheme will be subject to available funding and would progressed in partnership with HH and through the Council's Corporate Business Planning Process.

6.4 A key risk associated with this report is that parking proposals are not agreed delaying any town centre parking review.

6.5 The same risk is also associated with any enhancement scheme. This may have implications for securing funding at a level required to deliver any significant enhancements.

7. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Work on parking issues arising from this report will be undertaken from existing staff resources. Consultancy support may be required for some aspects of any TRO and enhancement design work.

7.2 The TRO process requires Notices to be published in the local press. Notices will also be posted on site in the areas affected and draft TROs will be made available to the public in Hitchin Library, NHDC Council Offices and NHDC website.

7.3 The Council will need to consider resource implications of administration and enforcement. At this stage it is anticipated that additional enforcement resource may be required depending on the outcome of any TRO process.

8. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND MEMBERS

8.1 The Cabinet Member for Transport has been consulted throughout the process to date.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 The Area Committee's views on the issues raised in this report form the basis for the review of Town Centre parking.

9.2 The Area Committee's views are requested on the type of Town Centre Enhancement scheme that it may wish to support (subject to available funding) in order that this can be progressed through the Corporate Business Planning process.

9.3 The Area Committee receives regular updates on progress with the Area Parking Review and Town Centre Enhancement from the Transport Policy Officer.

10. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 In order to progress the Area Parking Review and potential Town Centre Enhancement.

11. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

11.1 This report is set out as an opportunity to consult the Committee and to raise and consider options.

12. APPENDICES

12.1 None.

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14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

14.1 NHDC Parking Strategy 2009.