

TITLE OF REPORT: HITCHIN TOWN CENTRE PARKING REVIEW - UPDATE

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF PLANNING, HOUSING AND ENTERPRISE

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report updates the Area Committee on progress with the Parking Review and seeks support for draft proposals affecting Hitchin Town Centre and other locations around the town.

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 Two areas of Hitchin were consulted in October to determine whether residents support an extension of permit parking controls to Saturday. In two other areas of Hitchin residents were asked whether they consider non-residential parking to be a problem.
- 3.2 Consultation has also been started on potential parking management options for the Common Rise/Meadowbank/St Michaels Road/Byron Close/Browning Drive/Coleridge Close area as well as Tilehouse Street/Wratten Road West/Old Charlton Road.
- 3.3 Draft Traffic Orders are due to be published for the Hollow Lane/St Anne's Road/Lyles Row/Mount Garrison permit parking proposals. This has been agreed with the two ward Councillors for this area and is a minor variation on the scheme first designed in 2009.
- 3.4 A number of yellow line 'junction protection' schemes are being progressed. This report seeks support for adding some proposals to the agreed list before any Traffic Orders can be published.
- 3.5 Following the last Area Committee further consideration has been given to proposals for on-street charging in the town centre. This report sets out these possible arrangements in more detail.

4. ISSUES

Background consultation

- 4.1 In permit parking Zones E and F residents and businesses were consulted on whether they wish to extend permit parking controls to Saturday. This has been done on the understanding that town centre or rail user parking may have been occurring on Saturday.
- 4.2 In two other areas ("Ickleford Road area" and "Grays Lane area" for the purposes of summarising) residents and businesses were consulted on whether there was a non-resident parking problem or not.
- 4.3 Surveys were distributed to a total of about 2,000 households between 5th and 7th September. The closing date was 30th September 2011. More information on the survey can be found in Appendix A.
- 4.4 The results clearly demonstrate that residents and businesses in Zone E and F do not wish to extend parking controls to Saturday so it is recommended that no changes are made to these Zones.
- 4.5 In the Ickleford Road and Grays Lane areas there was overall support for the view that non-resident parking was a problem.
- 4.6 The headline results were:
 - In "Ickleford Road area" 72.1% said there was a non-resident parking problem.
 - In "Grays Lane area" 58.2% said there was a non-resident parking problem.
 - In Zone E 35.8% agreed with extending the existing permit scheme to Saturday but 64.2% did not.
 - In Zone F 18.25% agreed with extending the existing permit scheme to Saturday but 81.75% did not.
- 4.7 In both Ickleford Road and Grays Lane areas many residents said that there is a parking problem (rather than a specific non-resident parking problem) and that while many said there was a problem they would like the Council to address there was no investigation of potential solutions and the suggestions by residents were very diverse.
- 4.8 Other related issues ranged from inconsiderate parking, speeding and reluctance to pay for any potential parking permits.
- 4.9 The evidence from the household surveys will need to be combined with other evidence such as observations by officers and any other survey work.
- 4.10 An evening observation survey in the Grays Lane area should give a quick, cost effective indication of the level of daytime non-resident parking. Assuming this is the case it is recommended that Officers agree options for consulting residents on with the ward Councillors for this area. It is anticipated that this consultation will commence in the New Year.

- 4.11 At this stage it is not entirely clear that there is a significant amount of non-residential parking in the Ickleford Road Area although it is worth noting that the streets nearest the town centre gave the clearest indication that there is. A confidential day/night number plate survey would help identify proportions of non-resident vehicles and officers are investigating costs for this work.
- 4.12 Subject to costs of survey work in the Ickleford Road Area and the results of this survey work establishing that a significant non-resident parking problem does exist, it is recommended that officers agree the way forward with ward councillors (i.e. options consultation or do nothing). Again any consultation would start in the New Year.
- 4.13 Before proceeding with any consultation for both of these areas, the Committee is advised to consider the principle of permit parking. Permit parking is the most flexible way of removing non-resident and promoting resident parking especially in locations with limited off-street parking (where it may be the only realistic option). Any future consultation on options is likely to include permit parking.
- 4.14 NHDC permits are charged at £76 per annum in 2011. There was some concern expressed by residents of the Ickleford Road and Grays Lane areas about paying for permits. Whilst this is not unusual, the Area Committee is asked to consider whether these concerns are sufficient to merit excluding permit parking from any options consultation. This will severely limit the options available, however, and may mean there is no viable way of promoting residents' parking.

Consultation in the Common Rise/Meadowbank/St Michael's Road and Tilehouse Street/Wratten Road West/Old Charlton Road areas

- 4.15 Consultation on both of the above areas remains ongoing. The options consultation material is set out at Appendix D. The results of this consultation will be reported to the next Area Committee.

Various small scale schemes

- 4.16 One of the agreed priorities for the area review was a package of junction protection schemes. Before details of the Orders for these schemes are prepared, the Committee is asked to consider some additions.
- 4.17 Regular requests are received by members of the public for parking controls at the junction of St Johns Road and Hitchin Hill. This is largely due to parking on both sides of St Johns Road so that there is insufficient space for vehicles turning into St Johns Road to pass vehicles moving or queuing in the opposite direction.
- 4.18 It is suggested that 'No Waiting At Any Time' be proposed to protect both sides of the junction and on the north west side of St Johns Road the 'No Waiting At Any Time' restriction extends as far as St Johns Path. This will ensure the junction of St Johns Road and Hitchin Hill is kept clear along with one side of St Johns Road. The main purpose of these proposals is to reduce the likelihood of any safety problems and improve the free flow of traffic. Parking would be retained on the south east side of St Johns Road.

- 4.19 It is likely that residents compete for parking space in this location so some parking will displace, probably to Latchmore Close and the layby on Stevenage Road. Some of the parking in this area may be non-resident but no information is available to support this view.
- 4.20 Increasing numbers of complaints are being received about parking in the layby on St Johns Road where recycling facilities are located. No precise information is available but it is probable that parking in this layby has been displaced from the recent Standhill Road/Cemetery Road scheme. As the layby is for users of recycling and leisure facilities it is suggested that a limited waiting restriction of up to 3 hours, Monday to Saturday is implemented. No restriction is suggested for the layby opposite.

On-street charging

- 4.21 At the last Area Committee the principle of on-street charging was discussed. Whilst recognised as a difficult issue, the Area Committee did not object to the principle. Further work has been undertaken to start to develop proposals on the basis that peripheral/non-retail frontage streets should be considered first.
- 4.22 In the following streets it is therefore suggested that on-street charging is considered and more detailed work is progressed on likely costs and income. All locations have existing formal or informal parking:
- **Portmill Lane** – Mon-Sat, 8am-6pm. Up to 1 hour 50p. On-street parking stands opposite charged car parks so this location could be considered to be an extension of the car park. This is not a retail frontage street and the proposed charge is cheaper than the adjoining car park. Time limit and charge designed to promote high turnover, short stay parking.
 - **Biggin Lane** (rear of market) – Mon, Wed, Thu, 8am-6pm. Up to 1 hour 50p. Tue, Fri, Sat Permit holders only (permits issued to market traders). Parking currently takes place here partly on NHDC land and partly on highway. This could be formalised so that on non-market days the parking is available for short stay, high turnover parking. The proposed charge supports this. On market days parking would be for market traders only via permits (as per Biggin Lane Car Park).
 - **Biggin Lane** (layby alongside River Hiz). Mon-Sat, 8am-6pm. Up to 1 hour 50p. On-street parking stands opposite charged car park so this location could be considered to be an extension of the car park. This is not a retail frontage street and the proposed charge is cheaper than the adjoining car park. Time limit and charge designed to promote high turnover, short stay parking.
 - **Hollow Lane** (between Mount Garrison/St Andrew's Place and Queen Street, both sides). Mon-Sat, 8am-6pm. Up to 1 hour 50p, up to 2 hours £1.00. On-street parking stands near to charged car parks. This is not retail frontage street and the proposed charge is cheaper than the nearby car parks. Time limit and charge designed to promote high turnover, short stay parking albeit with 2 hours available. Proposals for permit parking in adjoining streets will protect residents from displacement and one side of Hollow Lane beyond Mount Garrison is proposed to remain unrestricted for all day users although this could be charged as an all day rate (over 2 hours £2.00).
 - **Queen Street** (opposite ASDA). Mon-Sat, 8am-6pm. Up to 1 hour 50p, up to 2 hours £1.00. On-street parking stands near to charged car park. This is not a core retail frontage street and the proposed charge is cheaper than the nearby car parks. Time limit and charge designed to promote high turnover, short stay

parking albeit with 2 hours available. Surrounding streets are protected from displacement by yellow line and permit parking restrictions.

- **Park Street** (between junctions of Standhill Road and Bridge Street). Mon-Sat, 8am-6pm. Up to 1 hour 50p, up to 2 hours £1.00. This is not a retail frontage street and the proposed charge is cheaper than the nearby car parks. Time limit and charge designed to promote high turnover, short stay parking albeit with 2 hours available. Surrounding streets are protected from displacement by yellow line and permit parking restrictions.
- **POTENTIALLY Old Charlton Road/Wratten Road West.** Consultation of local residents and businesses has suggested both permit and short stay parking in these streets. Short stay parking is also suggested to be charged as an option. The results of this consultation are not yet known but this location could provide up to 2 hour charged parking as per the above proposals. No assumption has been made about charging in this location for the purposes of business planning.

- 4.23 All of the above charges mirror the Council's rounding strategy. At this stage it is not envisaged that charges would apply to Sundays or evenings.
- 4.24 Clearly the main issue regarding on-street charging is what are the implications for the town centre? There is no simple way of quantifying the impact although the main point to bear in mind is the strength of the attractiveness of the town centre. Hitchin remains relatively attractive as a retail and service centre. Vacancy rates in Hitchin in 2010/11 were 7.4%, and 8.4% in 2009/10. This compares with the national average of 13.6%.
- 4.25 The charges suggested in this report are cheaper than off-street car parks (except Woodside) so may be considered reasonable by comparison. It is intended that each location would be served by a solar powered Pay and Display ticket machine that would offer cashless payment via card as well as the existing Pay by Phone service. Cash would therefore not be needed to use these locations.
- 4.26 Some of the locations proposed are next to chargeable car parks and in the case of Portmill Lane and Biggin Lane free on-street sits next to chargeable off-street. This arrangement would be more logical if the on-street parking was restricted to very short stay (i.e. 15-20 minutes maximum stay) but with up to 1 hour or unlimited/informal parking provided on-street, this parking is likely to be serving the same function as the chargeable car parks.
- 4.27 None of the suggested on-street parking relates to core retail areas. It is suggested that there is a need to retain some free, high turnover on street parking in the town centre.
- 4.28 The requirement to display a ticket (or have purchased a Pay by Phone 'session') would make the management/enforcement of these areas more efficient. This in itself should ensure spaces turnover more efficiently which benefits the town centre, especially at busy times.
- 4.29 Assessment of likely costs and income from on-street charging will need to consider non-payment of charge, ticket transfer and free parking by Disabled Badge Holders in order that estimates are robust as part of the development of a business case.
- 4.30 The Committee's views on on-street charging are welcomed with a view to taking the above proposals forward as part of the Area Review with likely implementation in 2013/14. It is suggested that the Town Centre Manager also be consulted on the above proposals.

Sunday and evening car park charging

- 4.31 The potential for charging Sundays, evenings and Bank Holidays is still under consideration. The Committee's views expressed at the last meeting will be part of this process. The Committee will be advised on progress with these proposals.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 Any proposals for changes to parking management and enhancements will need to be agreed with Hertfordshire Highways and the Police.
- 5.3 The Council will be required to follow regulations on creating TROs including consulting all statutory bodies and considering any objections.

6. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 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. Capital work for on-street charging will be funded from the already identified Growth Area Fund budget.
- 6.2 A key risk associated with this report is that parking proposals are not progressed delaying the parking review.

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 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 will be required, especially for additional residents parking, 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 That no changes are made to Permit Parking Zones E and F following the recent consultation.
- 9.2 That the Transport Policy Officer agrees consultation options for parking management in the Ickleford Road and Grays Lane areas of Hitchin with ward Councillors and that, subject to available budget, these decisions be supported by further survey work to help determine the scale of non-resident parking in both areas.
- 9.3 That the proposals for St Johns Road be added to the junction protection package already agreed by the Area Committee
- 9.4 That the on-street charging proposals be agreed for the purposes of a more detailed appraisal and development of a business case and that the Town Centre Manager is consulted on them.
- 9.5 The Area Committee receives regular updates on progress with the Parking Review and from the Transport Policy Officer.

10. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 In order to progress the Hitchin Parking Review and to contribute towards covering the cost of on-street parking management whilst still providing reasonably charged, high turnover short stay parking provision to serve the town centre.

11. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 11.1 None at this stage. Much of the ongoing work is itself an option consultation process.

12. APPENDICES

- 12.1 Appendix A – Hitchin Parking Surveys – Areas 1,2, 3 (zone E), 4 (zone F).
- 12.2 Appendix B – Qualitative Comments from responses.
- 12.3 Appendix C – Use of Garages
- 12.4 Appendix D – Options consultation recently issued to Common Rise, Meadowbank, Byron Close, Browning Drive, Burns Close, Coleridge Close, St Michael's Mount, Tilehouse Street, Wratten Road East and Old Charlton Road

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14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 14.1 NHDC Parking Strategy 2009