

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of Joint Select Committee held as Remote Meeting on Monday, 2nd November, 2020 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

County Councillor L.Dymock (Chairman)
County Councillor P.Pavia, (Vice Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Batrouni, J.Becker, A.Davies, L.Dymock, A. Easson, P.Pavia, R.Roden, V. Smith, B. Strong, J.Treharne, A. Webb, S. Howarth, J.Pratt and S. Woodhouse

Also in attendance County Councillors: J.Pratt (Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Neighbourhood Services), S. Howarth, and S. Woodhouse

Officers in Attendance

Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Mark Hand, Head of Place-making, Housing, Highways and Flood
Paul Keeble, Group Engineer (Highways and Flood Management)
Graham Kinsella, Traffic And Road Safety Manager
Davina Hicks, Accountant
Trudy Humber, Technical Assistant
Neil Rosser, Civil Enforcement Manager
Jose Bachoir
Martin Dolan, Capita

APOLOGIES: None

1. Election of Chair

Councillor Lisa Dymock was appointed as Chair of this committee.

2. Appointment of Vice-Chair

Councillor Paul Pavia was appointed as Vice-Chair of this committee.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Review of Car Parking

Officer Mark Hand presented the report and answered the Members' questions, with additional comments from Neil Rosser.

Are there national guidelines for how many mother and baby spaces need to be in car parks?

There are no national guidelines for parent and child bays, or disabled bays. The matter was raised in a Joint Wales Taskforce meeting last week, but for now there are no guidelines for us to adhere to.

Are we looking at the right numbers for how many spaces are servicing Chepstow town, given that Station Road has payment spaces, for example?

Within the car parking charges introduced at the start of this financial year, there were agreements within the budget proposals to charge on some extra car parks: Station car park and Station Road car parks in Chepstow being two of them. We installed the machines but

didn't introduce charging at that time. Part of the reason was that it involved putting up new signage, and I suggested that we shouldn't replace the signage until the review was complete. The current signs have too many add-ons and confusing elements. Given that the review was starting, we decided not to impose the charges within those car parks at this time, so the data is technically correct at this time. We have Cabinet approval to charge in them but with their agreement, haven't done so. If the review concludes that those spaces should be free, then the charging machines will be removed and used elsewhere.

What about '1 Hour Free' spaces?

Council approved their introduction as a temporary measure until the end of September, at which point it was agreed that they would be withdrawn. In Chepstow, there has been a discussion around the Town Council possibly funding those free spaces until Christmas. There are still 15 free 30-minute spaces in Welsh Street car park. We are going to put together figures for Abergavenny and Monmouth for similar proposals, in case those town councils are interested. It's probably not something our budget can take, at this stage.

Regarding the proposal for 10 EV charging bays in Jubilee Way, Caldicot: there are potential plans to build properties in that area, and at this moment, we would have 10 empty spaces. Do we have the right balance between this and Woodstock Way?

We will raise the matter of balance with colleagues. We will need to consider this question throughout the county. We need to get the balance between making provision and encouraging use, and being realistic about current take-up rates of EVs. We don't want to have spaces sitting empty but, equally, a big problem for EV take-up and existing owners is the lack of charging provision.

Regarding tourists and overnight stays, how far down the route has the Tourist section of MCC taken this suggestion? Are there licensing or environmental requirements, electrical requirements, etc.?

None of those discussions has taken place yet – it is a new idea, and is added to this review as a suggested topic. It is quite correct that we need to engage with Nicola Edwards in Tourism, colleagues in licensing, and those who put forward the proposal, to understand fully what they would like. Many campervans have their own power supply and toilet facilities; those facilities are more typical of a proper campsite, rather than for a short duration of 1-2 nights. But we need to consider them, nevertheless.

Chepstow residents feel that there aren't enough blue badge spaces allocated in the right areas. Will more detailed data on blue badge usage be sought?

The data that the external company is collecting is relatively simple, using an ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) system to record cars going in and out, and determining how long they have stayed. We then get an anonymised source of that data. It doesn't link to blue badge use in that way, as the badge sits with the individual, rather than the vehicle. We will have to think about how we can get that specific usage data. It should be noted that a blue badge holder can park in any bay in the county for free, though non-blue badge bays do not have the extra width. Chepstow is particularly challenging because of its topography: it became especially clear during the Reopening Towns exercise that residents with limited mobility find the gradients in the town difficult, and we need to continue to take this into account.

Have we sought any external advice, e.g. Disability Wales, on the Accessible Monmouthshire website, and on this review in relation to blue badges?

This is a very good point. We have asked groups, including Tony Crowhurst (co-opted member of Adults Select), if they could assist with some of the information about the best routes between car parks and key amenities. Mr Crowhurst said that he had already provided that information to colleagues; if we don't still have it then we will re-engage with him. The website is not part of this review; it was just mentioned as happening. But we can bring Jan Whitham from Comms in at a later date if Members would like to hear more about it.

How is enforcement being considered, particularly in relation to blue badge spaces?

Two new members of staff are due to start on 23rd November. Given training schedules, we hope that they will be up and running in a month. We will then have a team of 6 officers. The plan is that we will have 2 officers in Abergavenny, Monmouth and Chepstow. One officer will stay in the town throughout the day while the other goes to any towns and villages in the immediate area. We will therefore have a much greater coverage of Monmouthshire than we have had previously, for both on-street and off-street enforcement.

Is the focus just on town centres, or are peripheral areas also being considered e.g. Bulwark in Chepstow?

The focus has just been on town centre car parks. If the group wants to consider those more on the outskirts and other areas then we can do so. The car park adjacent to Bulwark shops is privately owned – we are trying to fully understand the ownership – but we do have other car parks in the wider area.

Will the review look at the charging structure, and introduce more 30 min or 1 hour timeslots?

Yes, we are asking members to look at this. We want to look at the intended and unintended consequences of doing that for us, the high streets and vehicle movements/traffic volumes.

Have we considered fully the purpose of the use of parking, and gathering the right data?

This is a good point. The camera survey will look at duration of stay, and will probably give us a good idea as to whether people are workers/commuters vs. shoppers. But other than doing a survey of people as they park – which isn't part of the proposal at the moment – it's not clear how we would get that information. This is something we will need to go away and consider further. Duration of stay will probably tell us some of that information but perhaps not all of it. If this committee thinks that we need some other kind of survey then it would be useful to have that direction and hear ideas about how we could go about that.

What are the considerations of the impacts or benefits in the town centres? The short-term shoppers need to be considered.

Yes, town centres are struggling for various reasons. Internet shopping has changed things in recent years, Covid has changed them again. We know the impact that business rates have had. Whether the increased reliance on internet shopping resulting from Covid will continue remains to be seen. The national picture is very similar. The direction of travel generally seems to be that town centres will become more of a leisure destination i.e. going for a coffee and buying a few things, rather than coming away with a boot full of shopping bags. We don't fully understand yet how, but the town centres are definitely changing. The key to their health is about much more than just car parking, it's really about the offer – the physical attractiveness of the place; we're trying to use Covid as an opportunity to influence this with some of our temporary trials. There are other offers e.g. the scheme in Chepstow to increase the markets. Again, there's a balance to be found between very short drop in/drop off parking for people to nip in for one or two items, which dis-incentivises them from supporting another business,

perhaps by also buying a coffee. Capita can support us in understanding the impacts on travel patterns and on businesses.

Can we link disabled spaces with available facilities i.e. installing a lift at Chepstow station?

It is beyond the remit of this piece of work to decide whether the station should have a lift, but the point about disabled access is a pertinent one and will be kept in mind.

What does the asterisk mean in the table in 3.8 of the report?

That was supposed to be a footnote clarifying that 113 spaces in Chepstow includes the ones we discussed earlier i.e. the spaces with payment machines that are currently free.

Situations are likely to change considerably over the next 6-12 months. How are we going to take that into account, i.e. the current Covid review and the post-Covid review?

The suggestion would be that we continue with the review for now, collecting more evidence, but on the understanding that it might need further review in the future, given the Covid situation – as stated in 5.1 of the report. This review will not stand unchanging, but should be reconsidered in the next year or so as the Covid situation changes.

In Abergavenny, residents living close to the town are severely affected by visitors/shoppers/workers' cars parking there. Will this be reviewed, along with the rest of the car parking?

This is something we will need to cover. Recommendation 1 covers on-street parking around town and village centres. It was probably primarily to consider whether there should be weighting limits or charging. Part of that was prompted by Magor during the Reopening Towns exercise: there are some parking spaces in the square that local businesses and residents have agreed not to use, in order to keep them free for customers. So as part of that same recommendation, we could look at whether there are areas adjoining town centres that should perhaps have residential parking permits introduced, particularly if there are changes to fees that might mean people try to park more in adjoining streets – this would be another unintended consequence that we will need to consider. We have had a proposal from Abergavenny Town Council for some streets near the town centre; we will consider that separately from this process.

How are other members involved in the process?

We could perhaps look at this when we look at the schedule of meetings, and how we arrange a feature discussion – whether it is workshops, a working group, sub-committee, or joint committee. The committee could consider this.

Has any consideration been given to free parking after a certain time, e.g. 3pm?

It's not something that has been considered in detail, as this is very much the start of the process. But it is something that we could look at as we move forward, as part of this review. In a related way, it has been suggested that we should have very brief free parking for school drop-off – we could also look at that. But, again, we will have to balance it with unintended consequences i.e. does that encourage people to drive their children into school, rather than local residents walking or cycling. It could be that a long-term change is in parents not dropping their children off on their way to work, but it's much too early to know that yet.

In Usk, could the 18 new parking spaces (as a result of the HWRC closure) and the resurfacing of the 'prison' car park be hastened, please?

Yes, we are certainly mindful of these and are looking to get them done as quickly as possible. We have a meeting with the lining contractor this coming week – we therefore hope to have

something in place later this week, or early next week, to have the new spaces relined. The Town Council is contributing to the resurfacing of Maryport Street south car park but the situation has become a bit more complex because we would like to install lighting (potentially solar), and also consider the drainage issues before laying any tarmac – new drainage regulations are a factor. We will update Town Council on this matter.

Surely, two hours free parking everywhere would have a significant positive effect on impulse purchases, helping the businesses. A uniform policy for the whole county would be very helpful. We will consider those suggestions. In fact, the report doesn't mention the rates that we pay on free car parks – they do cost the Council money, and therefore the taxpayer, even though they might be 'free' to park in. The oft-cited parking in Cwmbran is free to the customer but they are paid for by the businesses via their rent – there is no such thing as a truly 'free' parking space.

Chair's Summary:

We agree to move forward and continue scrutiny with the approach suggested by Mark Hand. We have had a lot of feedback on these discussion points. For Chepstow, Councillor Becker raised a point about free parking on Station Road with the installation of payment devices but we haven't started charging yet. We have been advised that if they aren't required, they will be removed. There are still '30 minutes free' spaces in the town but a return of '1 hour free' has been requested; officers are liaising with town council to see if they can assist.

Councillor Easson raised points regarding electrical charging bays – whether we have the right balance of spaces, especially in Caldicot, and for overnight charging for campervans; we need to consider these provisions for tourism engagement. Councillor Davies noted that we need as much information as possible, with a facilitated structure, rather than a general structure. Councillor Pavia raised points regarding disabled access and whether we will use any third party advice, recommending Tony Crowhurst. We were informed of the two new staff members in enforcement, and the resultant improved coverage in the county. Mark Hand reminded us that any blue badge holder can park free of charge.

Councillor Brown asked for more '30-60 minutes free' zones and for a recommendation regarding the purpose of use of car parks, and capturing that data, considering short term shoppers and the impact on the high street. We need to understand more in light of Covid. Councillor Becker will feed back to the group and to Highways, and the changes required around Covid. Councillor Roden raised the matter of how we manage the two phases of current Covid review and the post-Covid review – we were assured that if another review is needed later, that can take place.

Councillor Woodhouse raised concerns around residential parking, and raised the matter of non-Select members attending subsequent meetings. Councillor Strong asked when the relining of the spaces gained in Usk from the HWRC closure will happen, as well as the resurfacing of the lower Maryport Street car park. We were advised that town council is overseeing the latter, but drainage and lighting need to be considered. Councillor Smith welcomes the review and would like to see a straightforward system across Monmouthshire.

Under Recommendation 8, and the matter of ticket machines, Mark Hand explained that the problems which users frequently have relates to the sim card in the machine, and the signal strength. Neil Rosser further explained that the company that currently manages the machines performed signal tests in a few areas recently, which will give us a better understanding of

which direction we should then take. There is the option to have different sim cards in different areas, or to use a signal booster (an aerial that attaches to the machines). One of the new systems in development is a storage machine: because the process can be delayed when there are multiple simultaneous users, the storage machine would save the information until a given point in the day, at which time it will upload and send all the payment details through together. Under Recommendation 9, José Bacheir from the company *paybyphone* gave a presentation about their mobile phone payment system, and answered the members' questions, with additional comments from Mark Hand.

Is the system 5G ready or compatible?

Yes, provided the user has a handset that is 5G ready, then it is compatible.

In the procurement, it says the customer pays by SMS and rate per transaction. Is that a separate fee from the car parking charge?

Yes, it would be a separate fee. If the parking fee were £1.00 per hour, it would be £1.05. The app would mention to the customer that this is an additional transaction fee.

How does it link with our enforcement strategy? Is it a completely new system, with us scrapping our existing one?

We provide enforcement with an API String, which they would import into their handheld devices. We currently work with your provider Imperial across 19 authorities. When the officers enter their location on the device it shows all active sessions at that location, with the registration numbers highlighted in green. Any showing in red have an expired session, and therefore should get a ticket. It is very simple, and we would work alongside your existing provider. We will meet with the enforcement team this week to discuss the proposals with them directly. If the system were approved, it would run alongside the existing system, so that all options are available.

Can other charges be added e.g. EV charging?

We are currently in talks with some EV charging companies so that we can have integration with our solution, and customers can pay for their EV charging through our app – it is expected in Q2/Q3 next year. We would allocate another location number to differentiate the payments. Further detail can be provided following this meeting. At the moment, the EV chargers are provided by a company, and the customer doesn't pay to park, only to charge, with the fee going to the company to cover its costs. We can address that complexity in a future meeting.

Is it an additional charge – are we effectively increasing charges to the client?

Yes, if they pay by phone then they pay the extra 5p. In the example of a £1.00 ticket, the council would keep the £1.00 and our company would take the 5 pence. We offer the option of a revenue share. For example, in Anglesey Gwynedd council opted to absorb the transaction fee (4 pence, in their case) which they offset with the SMS (text) revenue. Therefore, the council isn't increasing the cost to the customer – it remains the same as P&D.

Is it possible to add a short survey about why people are using the car park?

Not at the moment. However, we can add a URL into the email receipt that every customer receives – the URL could be a link to a survey, should they wish to complete one. We can't force a survey on customers but one can be offered.

Does the app allow the user to select languages other than English and Welsh?

Yes, the app recognises the setting on the phone so it automatically opens in the language of the phone, and it can be changed manually in the settings.

There is currently a range of tickets (day, season, etc.), and free parking at various times – are these covered in the app?

We can configure the app to include a free parking rate. If there is 1 hour free parking on a Sunday, for example, this can be accessed on the app. We can do standard day, as well as season tickets and permits.

Would the app cause confusion with disabled parking? i.e. blue badge parking is free, but there would be signs to pay with the app.

It would be a matter of how the information is conveyed on the tariff board. This issue was raised on Anglesey, and we worked with the council there to update the information and make it very clear to customers.

If the Council doesn't continue the contract after the trial period, would the signs be removed?

We provide stickers that go on the pay and display or tariff boards. In most cases, we take over from an existing provider, so we remove the old stickers and replace them with ours. If our service isn't continued after the trial period, we will send a team to remove our stickers.

Does the transaction charge vary according to the type of ticket?

It is a flat 5p rate for standard tickets and season tickets. There is a different rate for permits.

Chair's Summary:

We have considered compatibility with 5G, and how the app links with our enforcement. We have discussed assistance with EV charging, which is being explored. The question was asked about using the app for a survey to capture more data about car park use, but this is not possible, though there is an option to include a URL in the receipt. We heard concerns about disabled parking, and clarity regarding payments, as well as questions about different tickets and signage.

The schedule for future meetings was discussed. The next (second) meeting will discuss data of car park use, examine the proportion and location of short vs long stay parking, and the number and locations of disabled bays, as well as rates payable and financial impacts. The third meeting will hear evidence from Town and Community Councils and business representatives. The fourth meeting will consider Recommendations 7, 3, 2 and 11. The fifth meeting will consider options to simplify the fee structure, review permits, and consider an EV charging strategy and pricing schedule (Recommendations 5 and 4.) The sixth meeting will consider Recommendations 6, 1 and 10. The seventh meeting will be a review of consultation responses. Mark Hand answered further questions:

Can we access data from other users of the system, to understand the effects of its implementation?

We can ask if the company has data from other councils that we can see, though it will have been affected by Covid. Councillor Batrouni has noted that Bristol has used the system for a number of years, so should have accurate data. However, we are looking at this system only to offer a different payment method, to make things easier, rather than to change or increase car park usage.

Are we planning to use the marketing tool aspect of the system?

Yes, we would be interested. Bespoke Monmouthshire pictures can be included which feature particular sites and events throughout the year e.g. Abergavenny Food Festival.

Enforcement isn't covered in the Recommendations – will this be included in future meetings?

I don't think we need to review the enforcement service. Their remit and scope are specified in the legislation; it is up to us to do it. Towards the end of the review, the team could give an update on how their work has gone (number of tickets issued, car park revenue, etc.)

Do we know when workshops will start?

It would be good to keep momentum, looking potentially at monthly meetings. We have compressed the timetable from 7 meetings to 6, taking us up to May.

It was agreed for Mark Hand to implement the schedule, with meetings at 5pm.

The meeting ended at **11.00 am**