

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Special Economy and Development Select Committee held at County Hall, Usk on Thursday 20th February 2014 at 10.00 am

PRESENT: County Councillor J.L. Prosser (Chairman)

County Councillors: D. Dovey, G. Down, D.L. Edwards, D.J. Evans, R.J.C. Hayward, S. Jones, A. Watts and S. White.

County Councillors R. Harris, S. Howarth and B. Jones.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr R. Hoggins	- Head of Infrastructure Networks and Sustainability
Mrs D. Jackson	- Senior Fleet Management
Mrs A. Perrin	- Car Park Manager
M. Youngman	- Transport Policy Officer
Mrs T. Harry	- Head of Improvement and Democracy
Miss H. Ilett	- Scrutiny Manager
Mrs S. King	- Democratic Services Officer

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Rhian Watts - Parsons Brinkerhoff

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from County Councillors P. Jordan.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. PROVISION OF CAR PARKING IN MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

The Chairman welcomed the committee, officers and members of the public. The Special meeting had been convened to consider the findings of a report of the options for the future provision of car parking by Monmouthshire County Council, prepared by Parsons Brinkerhoff.

A presentation was received and members were invited to scrutinise the report and decide what comments and recommendations would be provided to Cabinet.

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The Chairman welcomed contributions from members of the public and these were received as follows:

- a) Mr J. Bannon – Retail business in Abergavenny and Chamber of Trade representative.

Implore personal concerns and those of Abergavenny Business Club regarding Sunday and Evening charges and timing of the report.

Retail in Abergavenny is not what it used to be, in 2007 there was increase, realise necessity but timing is critical.

Impact of car park charges and deterioration of town, affecting people coming in, way forward is to increase footfall and not put up charges to deter people. Met with officer, please be sympathetic to situation in the town. Will be negated by Sunday/evening parking – never known it as hard to trade in Abergavenny as it is now. Policy of increasing charges at this time, against trying to bring people into town – no queues in the town as there used to be.

Is there positive for evening/Sunday parking? Cost and revenue would be outweighed. Ask Monmouthshire County Council think about timing of it and think its sticking plaster of what could become of shopping centre in Abergavenny.

- b) Mr T. Konieczny – Representative of Abergavenny Civic Society.

Received report at weekend and a lot of work to look through, number of concerns, Parsons Brinkerhoff report – no reference to Abergavenny whole place plan, interventions for town centre. Adventa funding excellent consultation to increase food offer in town. Concern there is no management proposals for impact of Morrisons 300 space car park, which will offer free car park for shoppers in town. Should be clear management mandate before charges are increased.

- c) Mrs J. Mundy – Usk Chamber of Commerce

Was not consulted during the process. New chairman is keen to work with Usk council and assist with providing support for business/use and need. Report came through Saturday, note report states there is no capacity issue in Usk. Would like to feedback thoughts on it.

- d) Mr A. James – Monmouthshire County Council disability champion

Blue badge charging – people aren't concerned regarding cost it is about accessibility, cost will come into it as blue badgers can park on double yellow lines. If there is a cost then more blue badgers will park on double yellow lines, which will cause problem. Blue badges being charged, report highlights

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serious problem with unacceptable for disabled parking. New machines will cost £180k to make accessible, concern is accessibility, blue badges for mobility and disability issues – not about charging it is about car parks and unsatisfactory nature. Cost for implementing new ticketing machines, which have to be DDA compliant – concern in relation to accessibility.

- e) Mr R.D. Cummings - Monmouth and District Chamber of Trade and Commerce (written representation)

I have only been aware of the one hundred and thirty page document since last Friday and it has been challenge to study the report, engage with Monmouth Chamber members for their views and come up with credible comments in a three page letter.

There was extensive consultation with stakeholders prior to preparation of this report in contrast to the last one compiled by Capita Symonds. Each town covered by the report has its own challenges in relation to parking, but it has been widely acknowledge for many years that the major problem Monmouth faces is a lack of off street parking and we welcome the consultants proposals for new car parks behind the Queens Head and in Drybridge Park .

We are aware of the county council's need to find savings in the budget but believe that any increased income generated here will continue to be spent on improving the experience for those using car parks and to cover projects such as the Queens Head car park. As MP Eric Pickles said recently "car parks should not be a revenue stream for councils "

Whilst welcoming the opportunity to put the Monmouth Chamber's point of view it has been necessary to reduce comment to important issues and to make comments as succinctly as possible. Our response is simply divided into proposals in the report with which we concur, those we are against, options not considered by the consultants and apparent discrepancies. Some options proposed seem broadly neutral in their effect on business and, due to the confines of a short letter, we have not covered these.

- f) Mr G.D. Preece – Friends of Abergavenny Shopmobility (written representation)

Having studied the car park regime that is up for consideration by MCC may I make the following comment re them.

It seems from the recommendations that once again Abergavenny will suffer worst despite providing over 50% of the total receipts from car parking in MCC carparks.

I find it astounding that Caldicot, the usage of the car parks as per your consultants report, is predominately used by commuters working outside

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Monmouthshire, quite possibly in jobs that are well able to support car parking charges and yet once again Abergavenny is being highlighted for the most change.

Much is made of the towns in the south of the county being close to out of town retail parks, my I also suggest that Abergavenny is as close retail parks in Brynmawr, Ebbw vale and Merthyr so the argument for Caldicot falls.

To the Abergavenny county councillors may I ask that you as reps for the town fight the proposal to allow Caldicot and possibly Usk to once again have get outs from car parking charges that the rest of the Monmouthshire towns quite rightly incur.

I also note that proposals for charge to Blue Badge holders say that disabled access to the machines will be addressed, I hope that this access will ensure that those with problems from contracture in their hands are able to use the proposed pay points easily.

g) Ms J. Barnes – CAIR (written representation)

Thank you for sending the report on the Monmouthshire Car Parking Study. I had not seen it although I sent plenty of information to the consultants.

I know that the report is being discussed by Councillors shortly. I am concerned it says that CAIR has been consulted, but they have come out with the recommendation that Disabled People should be charged for car parking in Monmouthshire's car parks, which is at odds with CAIR's views.

They have also not included CAIR's Car Parking document which was widely consulted on by disabled members and other disabled people, at several meetings.

They have put in the Appendices a letter from Sarah Griffith complaining about Market St, Abergavenny and a press release from CAIR that was published in the Chronicle about selfish on street parking. The Report that was done about the Car Parks is not there as far as I can see, although some bits are quoted from it.

As far as I can see no other groups of Disabled people were consulted so I feel that this is a serious omission. I request that CAIR's comments, included here be included in the Documents for deliberation by the council.

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We received a presentation from the Head of Operations, as follows:

- Issues/Recommendations/Budget/Alternatives?
- Issues
 - Machines
 - Parts becoming obsolete
 - Proposals rely on machines
 - Barrier controlled, considered but dismissed (due to prob as attendant needs to be in place, not staffed to do it)
 - New machines which simplify process
 - Poor Maintenance
 - Surfacing, markings, lighting
 - Urban design
 - Poor Signage
 - Directional signs on highways inadequate
 - Within car parks – needs updating – advertising
 - Short v Long stay and feeding meter
 - Majority are long stay car parks
 - People coming out part day and feeding meters, which hold up short stay car park
 - Changes to assist commerce
 - Look at each town separately
 - Towns finding it difficult to compete
 - Initiatives to invite people in
 - More parking available close to shops
 - Charging regime needs updating and simplifying
 - Charges have not changed for 7 years
 - Changes not simple (rounded) and no change given
- Recommendations
 - Upgrading to networked machines p21/22
 - Explains why/rationalise upgrading of machines. Existing machines becoming obsolete. Need to invest in new machines, cost of ticket machines £298k – partly offset by reduction in yr on yr maint cost – from 15k to just under £3k. Doesn't offer barrier control but also card/phone/cash payment. Machine more user friendly and DDA compliant, some advertising also within machine.
 - Increasing parking charges p22
 - Charges static since 2007, workshops debated charges in depth and whether charge deters people from coming to town. One response was to round it up – this has been reflected in report. Income of £200k. every year budget is set, assumption made that fees and charges increase, but charge has never been changed so nothing has been done to affect change. Lots of

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other factors have affected income stream, change in patterns/shopping patterns/downturn in retail. Rec put forward to round up charges. Could be done with existing machines,

- No return policy at short term car parks p22
 - In short term car parks, no return after 2hrs. Will have to consider category of some car parks, need to generate turnover in car parks closer to shops. So have to avoid feeding meter. More business for shops, no return. Networked machines would be necessary.
- Improve signage p 26/27
- Sunday charging p23
- Evening charging p25

During discussion we noted the following points:

Machines

- A query was raised in relation to the security issue of machines holding cash and the discrepancy in tariff charges for short term car parks (e.g. £3.50 all day and £3.80 for 6 hours). We were advised that pay and display machines, historically have never provided change and machines in a secure environment would be pay on foot and would contain change.
- The committee were informed that currently charges are 80p or £1.80 therefore in some instances customers give £1 or £2, resulting in 20p excess, an estimate of 15/20% of overpayments were made. Further information regarding figures would be provided to the committee.
- Clarification was provided regarding discrepancies in short and long term stay parking, short term is a maximum 4hr ticket at £1.80 and then £1 per hour after. Long term would be £3.50 for the whole day.
- New machines would be networked and would recognise registration numbers, which would activate the no return policy, any faults or problems would be identified immediately and officers would be able to address the problem in real time. Machines would be Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant. Further investigative work was required, with suppliers, regarding the type of machines that would be installed.

Parking Charges

- A member queried whether there was any additional evidence of charges affecting footfall and comparison to other authorities. Research had been undertaken into the impact of the charge and comparators may be available from the consultants. It was felt that tourism would be generated irrespective of car park charges.
- A question was raised whether free parking was considered. We were advised that the issue had been considered, however, there would be

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an impact of £1.3 million on the budget but there would be no operating costs of approximately £700/800k. Issues were also considered in relation to control of parking, which would be difficult to maintain if there was no cost.

- The Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) had been completed and it was recognised that pregnant women and people of a particular age may be affected. It was noted that pregnant women were considered during the EQIA process and would be included in the further stages. Age factors were also considered but considerable issues surrounded disabled people e.g. number classed in poverty.
- It was felt that there would be no conflict with the destination management and whole place plans. However, further work would be undertaken to establish the link with towns.
- A member highlighted that costs should be covered through car park charges and DDA compliance needed to be improved. There was agreement with 'rounding up' of charges, so that there was no need for change to be given.
- A suggestion was made that there was a provision to park for 1 hour (instead of a minimum of 2 hours). One hour parking may alleviate some problems in terms of controlled availability of spaces. One solution would not suit all of the towns as they each have different parking issues.
- We were advised that recommendations include considerations for a free hour in some towns. However, findings had concluded that people were likely to pay £1 for two hours to have longer in town and would be more convenient, personal behaviour was identified as a factor.
- It was suggested that issues surrounding enforcement should be considered further, as costs may outweigh income for evening and Sunday parking.
- Clarification was required regarding parking in Abergavenny and charges for parking in the proposed foodstore. We were advised that charges would reflect those in the Fairfield Car Park and it would be in the supermarkets interest to no provide free car parking.
- The Road Traffic Regulation Act sets out rights and statutes regarding generated surplus from car parking. The act explains how authorities can set a charge and explains legalities surrounding surplus. It was noted that it would not be a profit and would be reinvested elsewhere.
- It was suggested that one hour parking for 50p was introduced.
- Free half hour parking was available in Chepstow and this system had worked well.
- We recognised that some spaces within the towns were taken by people who worked within shops/premises. The committee were advised that the 'no return' policy should help this problem, as employees would have to park in long stay car parks which would free spaces closer to the town centre for shoppers.

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- Concerns were expressed regarding the towns used as comparison for Abergavenny and Chesptow, as there did not appear to be a connection.
- Further work was required so that free car parking could be sufficiently explored. There was a requirement to suit provision across the board.
- Charges must be compliant with initiatives of whole place plan.
- Each town is different, needs to be looked at in that manner. Consultation and engagement were important factors, views of the towns should be considered, to ensure needs are met.

No return

- It was highlighted that issues needed to be enforced.
- The longer stay car park should be used and no return will address issues.
- Identified need for quick turnover but have to take account of instances, where people need to stay longer. Enforcement is a major factor.

Signage

- General feedback was consensus to improve signage, to notify of short/long stay and improvement needed.
- Requirement to identify funding stream to undertake.
- Signage needs refurbishing and updating. Enforcement can be introduced into car park management with instructions on signs.

Sunday Charging

- Highlighted as a contentious issue.
- Concerns expressed that costs of enforcement would not cover income generated by Sunday parking charges.
- Generally, disagreed with this proposals and that it would be a disincentive for people to use towns.

Evening Charges

- Flat charge of £1 or range of night-time charging in heavily used areas. Justification is to generate funding to reinvest into service another way. Members to consider as issue is debated.
- Concerns that people may park on streets, as an alternative, which would cause hazards.
- Felt that evening charging would be detrimental to the night time economy.

Blue Badge Charges

- Representation had been received from CAIR (disablement association). It was highlighted that the issue of a blue badge would not be means based but would follow an assessment on a medical condition. Possession of a blue badge is not related to ability to pay. Charging for blue badge holders would bring in an income stream

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where there is currently not one. Charging within the private sector is common place (e.g. NCP car parks).

- Some members felt that charging was acceptable and justified. However, adequate disabled parking would be required in appropriate locations.
- It was suggested that some blue badge issues were abused and used illegally.
- Some views were expressed that disabled badge holders should not be charged for parking.
- We were informed that the Welsh Government were looking into how blue badges were issued and workshops were being held, the disability group had identified the importance of the badge. Criteria would be considered for all local authorities so that it would be common place across Wales.
- We recognised that any issues of abuse should be enforced.
- Upon being put to the vote the majority of the committee were in favour of blue badge holders being charged for car parking.

Urban Design

- Car parks require investment and are currently not well maintained. Public infrastructure going into highways repairs, capital improvements into car parks. Opportunity for improvement and visual enhancements.
- Committee agreed spaces should be well marked and in favour of improvement, but not if it results in significant cost.
- Discussions were held regarding introduction of solar panels to generate income. We were advised that this idea had been suggested in order to generate income.
- Committee minded to support review of urban design

Enforcement

- Currently on street enforcement would be undertaken by Gwent Police. On street enforcement was de-criminalised and handed to local authorities, who would manage on and off street car parks. This had not happened in Monmouthshire.
- Enforcement would introduce income however, significant costs would be involved to operate. Further discussions were on-going with Gwent Police.
- Parking on main roads should be enforced and should be carried out appropriately.
- Requirement to discuss with police and regulate traffic flow, parking and increase vibrant towns.
- Opportunity for the authority to engage and alleviate crisis spots and enforce properly. Need to look at situation and identify problems.
- Welcome on-going discussions.

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HGVs/Coach/Motorbike

- Further work to be undertaken as consultants not commissioned to do. Good practice schemes have been referred to within the report.
- The committee welcomed on-going investigation.
- Problems were highlighted in particular areas of Chepstow and Monmouth. Designated places/areas would be beneficial, to alleviate problems.

Members highlighted additional issues, as follows:

- Commuter car parking and loss of spaces.
- Lease at Severnbridge social club car park. We were advised that the club had proposed planning application for club house and retail site. Lease would exist until end March, but then notice would be given on whether to lease in future.
- Specific details would be discussed with officers regarding insufficient car parking in Usk, in terms of planning applications.
- Concern in Usk regarding charges, possibility of moving shoppers to free towns. Recognised all towns have different issues.
- Devolution of car parks to towns, season tickets and resident parking.
- Detail required on specific issues within each town.

Officers advised that issues considered so far within the report had been generic proposals, however, there was further information to be considered regarding specific sites within the towns.

The committee highlighted that further engagement was required with local groups and town/community councils.

We agreed that wider discussions would be held at area committees in relation to specific issues for local areas.

The Democratic Services Officer would liaise with officers and Chairs.

The meeting ended at 1.05pm.

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