

AT A MEETING
of the

CAR PARKS WORKING GROUP

held at The Council House, Walsall on

Wednesday 2 November 2005 at 6.00pm.

PRESENT

Councillor Rob Robinson
Councillor D Anson
Councillor I Shires
Councillor Rose

APOLOGIES

Apologies for non attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillor Aslam, Councillor Yasin, Councillor Andrews, Councillor Longhi.

RECEIPT OF DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest and members confirmed there was no party whip.

NOTES OF MEETING 30 SEPTEMBER 2005

AGREED

That the notes of the meeting previously circulated be received as a correct record.

MATTERS ARISING

RESEARCH OF OTHER AUTHORITIES REVIEWS

Bexley

Councillor Anson advised that he had read through the review and found that little could be learned from the scrutiny carried out by Bexley. He said that in his opinion many of the issues relating to staff car parking and long and short stay car parks identified by this work group were also issues at Bexley, however they have 22 car parks and 25 car-parking attendants. He summarised that they were in a similar position as Walsall.

Bolsover

Councillor Robison said that he read the review and had found little to inform Walsall's review. He said that they had been out and visited every car park in the course of their review and that he had noted that currently they do not charge staff

for parking. He agreed with Councillor Anson that the issues seemed similar and suggested that the key thing was to review the balance of long stay car parks and short stay car parks.

INFORMATION REQUESTED AT THE LAST MEETING

DECRIMINALISATION REPORT TO CABINET

The report of cabinet was discussed, having previously been circulated.

Councillor Shires asked if officers were looking at on street parking and was advised that the consultants would be looking at and including on street parking in the draft strategy, but that this group had a different remit to consider and feed into the strategy.

Councillor Robinson thanked officers for finding the report out and acknowledged Councillor Shires point he said that it is important for the strategy to recognise the importance of enforcement, particularly relating to on street parking because without it people will park anywhere.

Members recognised that decriminalisation will mean a utilisation of additional resources to give a wider range of duties and ability to direct the resource where it is needed. There followed a brief discussion about the transfer of staff and in response to questions members were advised that of the staff currently working in the traffic warden service, 7 would transfer, 2 were directly employed by the police and 8 were on contract.

CROWN WHARF CAR PARK

In response to members questions at the previous meeting officer received information relating to the Parking provision at Crown Wharf retail park.

The following information was shared with the group:-

- There are 591 spaces at Crown Wharf
- The first hour of parking is free
- After the first hour the parking charge for two hours is double the Council car park charges, in summary the fee to park is more than Council car parks.

Members considered the information and discussed the following key points:-

- Members were advised that there should be consultation with the council before increasing parking charges at Crown Wharf
- The scheme should have a pricing structure similar to that of the short stay car parks not necessarily the same
- There are problems with the operation of the barriers at the site, which causes a queue of traffic on Wolverhampton Street. Members requested that enquiries should be made to find out if work has been carried out to resolve the operational problems and if not, why it is taking so long
- The queuing on the street is a highways matter and the body responsible for enforcement is the police. Members were informed further that the queuing is probably seasonal as generally the car park was considered to be underused.

Members noted the information and requested that it be forwarded to highways officers.

CAR PARKING AT CENTRO

Members were advised that there are two Centro Car parks Bloxwich North and Bescot Stadium and received documents informing members of the usage count as at 23/9/05. The information was considered and members highlighted the following issues: -

- Both car parks seemed to be largely under utilised
- Security – the car parks are not perceived to be safe

Members gave consideration to how the car parks could be better used and improved. Officers advised that this is an apt time to put forward a bid to develop lighting and CCTV security on the line north out of Cannock due to the Chase-line improvement plan, an opportunity to create a rail showcase and to fully utilise the car park.

Members discussed the siting of Bloxwich station, members discussed if the station would be better placed in the centre of Bloxwich but noted that there is no car park provision at the original station and that it would cost in the region of £2m to create a new station, which is outside the financial remit.

Members noted that both stops were last from the Town Centre and that there is a possibility of a park and ride facility but that there are issues:-

- Security issues to be resolved
- Who would pay
- Service level / usage level
- Frequency and capacity of trains

Officers advised that there is an opportunity for the council and Centro to work together

INITIAL REPORT ON CURRENT AND PREDICTED FUTURE ISSUES

The interim report was presented to members by Paul Leighton and Mark Clough. Councillor Robinson said the report was excellent and accurately summarised the information that the group has been scrutinising. Members noted the report and asked that officers be congratulated on this excellent document.

QUESTIONNAIRES

Staff Questionnaire

The draft questionnaire was circulated. Members agreed that it is necessary to collate information from the staff but voiced concerns that if not handled correctly may raise staff concerns and may be seen as controversial.

Officers advised that the intention is to distribute the questionnaire to pass holders via a digital link and that the councils Information System Support team (ISS) collate the responses in a database to provide information to feed back to the group.

Members were advised that there are corporate guidelines that will be adhered to and that the draft questionnaire would be checked by the communications team and by Human Resources team to ensure that the questions are within council guidelines.

Members agreed the questionnaire and the proposed way forward. Councillor Robinson requested that officers contact the portfolio holders to confirm their support and to ensure that before circulating the questionnaire approval is gained from legal, human resources and the communications team to ensure that the questionnaire follows guidelines.

Authority Questionnaire

Members were advised that a questionnaire to other authorities could be sent electronically to gather evidence of how other authorities have approached staff car parking. The following areas of questioning were suggested: -

- How does the Authority manage staff car parking
- What are their strong points
- Have they introduced innovation
- Have they carried out a review

It was suggested that the questionnaire be kept short and to the point to have maximum impact approximately 12 key questions; and that an established network be approached by the car parks manager.

Members agreed that the Local Authority questionnaire be circulated to gather relevant information to inform the work of this group

PARKING STRATEGY

Mr Nick Secker was in attendance at the meeting to update members on the progress being made by the consultants and to outline the questionnaire being used by the consultants to inform the draft parking strategy. Members were informed of the methods of information gathering including 'face to face' interviews and members were taken through the questionnaire.

Members asked for the following points to be taken into account by the consultants: -

- Where the face to face interviews are taking place and at what time of day
- Early morning will engage working people and during the course of the day the general public probably shoppers and visitors to the town
- Car park users in the district centres should also be engaged at all times of the day
- Lorry and coach parks should be taken into account
- Walsall Regeneration Company (WRC) should be involved
- Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) should be involved

He outlined his role and the brief he was working to. He distributed a document to members and gave a summary of the key points identified relating to regeneration:-

- Proposal to build a multi-storey commercial building at the Wharf. He indicated that the proposals suggest that the ground floor would be commercial premises with a two or three storey car park and a hotel as the top level.
- Tesco development he suggested that there is a need to feed into the initial proposals and officers to give careful consideration of parking provision, particularly the loss of spaces on Council car parks

There followed a period of discussion which identified some key questions to be considered when pulling together the draft strategy:-

- Is there a break down of the revenue implications due to loss of car park spaces and will this be taken into consideration at budget setting
- Should the car parks manager continue to issue parking passes knowing that the spaces available may reduce

Councillor Robinson thanked Mr Secker for attending. Mr Secker thanked members for asking him to attend and said that the meeting had been very interesting and had given him an insight into the type of strategy to develop for Walsall. Members agreed that the session had been very interesting and mutually beneficial.

AGREED ACTIONS

1. That the Local Authority questionnaire be prepared and circulated
2. That the Staff questionnaire be finalised following council guidelines and circulated
3. That a summary of the findings be brought to the next meeting of the work group

TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting terminated at 7.30 p.m.