

<b>REPORT TO THE OVERVIEW &amp; SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>		Report No. 15
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	<b>11 September 2008</b>	
<b>Title of Report</b>	<b>Car Parking Charges Task Group – Final Report</b>	
Link to Corporate Priorities	Community – Transport	
Public Report	Yes	

### Summary of Report

**This report sets out the findings of the Car Parking Charges Task Group.**

### Recommendations

**The Task Group recommendations are set out in paragraph 14 of the report.**

Other than those implications agreed with the relevant Officers and referred to below, there are no other implications associated with this report.

Financial Implications	Legal Implications	Community & Environmental Implications	Human Resources Implications	Equality & Diversity Implications
None	None	None	None	None

<b>Contact</b>	Cllr C. Reid, Chair of Task Group 01249 712992
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## **1. Terms of Reference**

1.1 The Terms of Reference of the Task Group were as follows:

To consider the impact of the abolition of the one hour free parking on local businesses in market towns.

(1) To take evidence from local businesses in the towns where one-hour free parking has been abolished.

(2) To evaluate how other market towns across Wiltshire are addressing car parking issues.

(3) To consider what issues are affecting the market towns and to make recommendations on how these might be addressed including:

Availability of parking

The role of supermarkets in assisting their customers with car parking charges

Road access to the towns

Free transport provided by the out of town supermarkets

(4) To evaluate the particular parking issues in each of the market towns in North Wiltshire

(5) To establish what policy the Unitary Authority may have towards car park charging across Wiltshire

(6) To aim to report findings and make recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for endorsement within four months of the first meeting.

## **2. Process**

2.1 Membership – C. Reid (Chair), Councillors T. Clements, P. Coleman, J. Hartless, S. Parker, R. Sanderson and C. Wannell

2.2 The report was not intended for NWDC, who, because of the move to Wiltshire Council, would be unable to implement any of the changes that may be called for. It is intended to help the new Unitary Council come to a decision on parking charging policies for the new authority.

2.3 The establishment of the Task Group was agreed by NWDC Overview & Scrutiny, but it was clear from the Officers that their support would be extremely limited and would be restricted to a little clerical support and some desk research. Any meetings would be attended and minuted by Members only, and the report would be written in draft by the Chair of the Task Group, before consideration by the Members.

2.4 At their initial meeting, the Members agreed that evidence and information would be requested from the Town Councils and Chambers of Commerce of Calne, Chippenham, Corsham, Malmesbury and Wootton Bassett. Meetings with representatives of these organisations would be held in each of the five towns and it was requested that, where possible, evidence be provided to the Task Group in advance of the meetings.

2.5 The questions asked in a letter sent to all of those invited were:

Q1. What has been the impact of the loss of the free hour on:

- a) Small businesses in your town?
- b) Larger multiples in your town?

Q2. What has been the impact on parking patterns in your town, both for on street parking and in car parks?

Q3. How many, if any, of the shops have made a financial contribution to customers to cover the loss of the free hour?

Q4. Are there any other parking issues particular to your town you wish to bring to our attention?

2.6 The advance information from the Towns was limited, and the quantity and quality of the evidence the Group received was varied. The Task Group would have needed more time and more resources to conduct a more detailed piece of work. Despite this the Task Group believes this was a valuable exercise which raises some significant issues.

2.7 In its questioning the Task Group was anxious to separate the impact, if any, of the loss of the free hour parking on local businesses from the current economic downturn.

### **3. Meetings Held**

14 May	Initial meeting to agree the process and consider the letter to be sent to the Towns.
16 July	Meeting in Malmesbury.
23 July	Meeting in Wootton Bassett.
28 July	Meeting in Chippenham.
29 July	Meeting in Corsham.
13 August	Meeting in Calne
8 September	Meeting to consider the draft report.

### **4. Background Information**

4.1 The Executive Committee took the decision to alter the charging arrangements, including the abolition of the free one or two hours' parking, at their meeting on 6 March 2007. These changes were implemented on 2 April 2007 with the exception of the proposed charges for the Newlands Road Car Park, Corsham and Borough Fields Car Park, Wootton Bassett which were adopted for consultation as required under the terms of the management agreements applicable to each car park.

### **5. Meeting with Calne Town Council and Chamber of Commerce**

#### **Present:**

Daryl Saville-Brown	Deputy Town Clerk
Mick Davenport	C of C
Cllr. T. Trotman	TC and C of C
Paul Harris	C of C
Clare Harris	Town Development Support Officer
Cllr C. Reid	NWDC
Cllr J. Hartless	NWDC
Cllr T. Clements	NWDC
Cllr R. Sanderson	NWDC

Cllr J. Parker            NWDC  
Cllr R. Tonge            NWDC (Observer)

Calne Population – 13,789<sup>1</sup>

Parking Spaces:        Church Street 77 spaces<sup>2</sup>    LS<sup>3</sup>

There are also large free car parks attached to Sainsbury and Somerfield in the heart of the town totalling approx. 370 spaces

- Q1. There has been a downturn in trade for the smaller businesses in Calne. The primary impact had been from the introduction of priority traffic calming in Curzon Street (a main artery both for through traffic and access to shops and car parks) which was then exacerbated by the loss of the one hour free parking in Church Street.

Local trader Paul Harris conducted his own consultation work with 110 shops/businesses in the town centre, 80 of whom responded. All bar two of these commented that they had experienced a significant loss in trade which they believed had been due to this combination of factors. The shops and businesses, with the exception of the food outlets had experienced up to a 20% drop in trade.

No information was given on the large multiples, but both Sainsbury and Somerfield in the town centre have their own free parking.

- Q2. The loss of free parking in Church Street had led to a significant increase in the level of on street parking particularly by those who work in the town centre.
- Q3. No shops had made a financial contribution to shoppers to pay towards car parking.
- Q4. Anxiety was expressed about the impact of the proposed regeneration of Phelps Parade in the town centre on future parking patterns and availability.

Other points:

The Town Council would very much like to take over the car parks under the Unitary scheme of delegation, and be responsible for the setting and collection charges.

## **6. Meeting with Chippenham Town Council and Chamber of Commerce, Chippenham, Town Hall**

### **Present**

Nynke Hunter            Chippenham Chamber, Secretary  
Rob Perks                Chippenham Chamber, Vice President  
Dave Purton             Chippenham Chamber, Exec Member  
Cllr C. Reid              NWDC  
Cllr T. Clements        NWDC  
Cllr S. Parker            NWDC

Unfortunately two members of Chippenham Town Council went to the wrong venue, so they were not represented, although they have been in correspondence with the Chair and their comments taken into account.

Chippenham Population – 33,189

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<sup>1</sup> Town populations and all that follow are taken from [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk)

<sup>2</sup> Parking Space information taken from NWDC web-site except Wootton Bassett High Street (CC)

<sup>3</sup> LS – Long Stay / SS – Short Stay

Parking Spaces:	Bath Road	233	LS
	Borough Parade	195	LS
	Brake Mead	22	SS
	Emery Gate	342	S/LS
	Gladstone Road	38	SS
	Monkton Park	90	SS
	Sadlers Mead	165	LS
	Spanbourn Avenue	44	LS
	Wood Lane	67	LS

The meeting raised the following points:-

- Q1. There was an initial impact on trade as a result of the loss of the free hour for two to three months, but it has now disappeared.
- Q2. There is an increase in cars driving around looking for free spaces on roads in and around the town centre causing a problem for residents in previously quiet areas and workers (who used to park in these places).
- Q3. A few shops did initially make a financial contribution to shoppers to cover the parking fee, but this has virtually disappeared.
- Q4. The main problem currently concerning the traders is the cost of car parking to workers in the town. It was felt strongly that they should be given some concessions. Some shop workers who use the short stay car parks, leave work to put a new ticket on their car, especially part time workers.

There was support for the introduction of a park and ride scheme for Chippenham.

It was felt that payment at exit barriers of car parks would be a positive help.

Other points raised from correspondence with Town Councillors:-

- Further support for pay at the exit of car parks.
- Electronic signs at major entrances to town saying how many spaces available and where
- Problems of cars parking in the pedestrianised area of the Market Place (work currently underway with WCC, NWDC, and CTC to resolve this).
- Lack of car parking capacity in Chippenham at peak times (Christmas and weekends) exacerbated by poor sign posting and lack of awareness of the station car parks reduced weekend rates.

## 7. Meeting with Corsham Town Council and Chamber of Commerce, Corsham Town Hall

### Present:

David Martin	Clerk, Corsham TC
Cllr Allan Bosley	Chair, Corsham TC
Cllr Rod Taylor	Corsham TC
Julie & Stuart Palmer	C of C
Steve Hible	C of C
John Coppin	C of C

David Slater	C of C
Ian Storey	President C of C
Bill Hall	Owner, Martingale Centre (Corsham Precinct)
Cllr C. Reid	NWDC
Cllr T. Clements	NWDC
Cllr J. Hartless	NWDC
Cllr S. Parker	NWDC

Corsham Population – 11,318

Parking Spaces:	Springfield Centre	82	LS (away from town centre)
	Newlands Road	87	2 hrs
	Post Office Lane	118	LS
	High St	40	LS

- Q1. There has been a very significant impact on the small businesses in the town, as a result of the loss of the free hour. E & S Electrical have figures showing a 13% loss. Angle Picture Framing noted falls in turnover in 2007 as against 2006 of 7% in May, 18% in June and 20% in July. Some of this has now been recovered. Other businesses reported losses of 7%, 18% and 20%, but business is slowly coming back, the traders found it difficult to be sure why, as customers are still complaining regularly about the charges.

The loss for many of these shops has been in the smaller cheaper impulse buy items purchased by browsers. Customers still purchase the larger items which warrant specific journeys.

Somerfield, the largest shop in Corsham, was the only large multiple to contribute to this enquiry. The car park adjacent to Somerfield is owned by NWDC (the store has no car park of its own which is unusual for a fairly large food store.)

A written report from the manager stated that the initial impact of the loss of free parking was a drop of £6,000 per week, which meant a delay in filling staff vacancies. Till transactions dropped by 2% and are still down.

Sainsbury (1½ miles clear road from Corsham with free parking) reported a £50,000 month increase in turnover.

Employees starting their shift at 5.30 p.m. have to pay for one hour, to avoid the penalty notices before 6 p.m. The parking machines do not give change, and customers complain they have to put in 50p for 1 hour as they don't have 30p change.

- Q2. There has been a significant and sometimes dangerously increased amount of on street parking in residential roads. The Town Council provided a series of photographs illustrating this, also showing the half empty long stay car park at peak hours.
- Q3. A number of shops offer a refund of the 30p parking fee. Somerfield refund on purchase of £10 and over, this averages 500 a week, leading to a £150 reduction in margins (one staff job).
- Q4. Other parking issues – there is an irritation that shop workers and shoppers are causing congestion on narrow residential roads, when the main car park has many empty spaces, the Chamber of Commerce would like to see reserved workers parking.

Other issues raised:

- WCC conducted a Household Survey in 7 community areas including Corsham published in July 2008. Q.9 of the survey was “thinking about Corsham Town Centre, what is the main thing you would like to see improved?” 38% of 339 respondents mention parking, 88 concerned with the loss of free parking in the Somerfield car park. Most want free parking returned, but many suggest “free 30 minute parking”. This is a significant response to an open question.
- 2,200 people work at the MOD, in and around Basil Hill Barracks, one mile west of Corsham. Few of them now call into Corsham at lunch time, preferring to bypass the town and drive to Sainsbury. The CO of Basil Hill has strongly endorsed the Town Council support for the hour’s free parking.
- The owner of the precinct stated that car parking charges are a significant factor in the non-letting of two prominent retail units in the Martingale Centre.
- The cost of maintenance of the NWDC Newlands Road car park falls to the tenants of the Martingate Centre.
- The Corsham TC Transport Plan states that it will support and encourage a first hour free policy in all public car parks. It is willing to take over responsibility for managing off street parking provision.
- The attendance and the range of evidence presented by Corsham indicated the significance of this issue to the Town.

**8. Meeting with Malmesbury Town Council and Chamber of Commerce – Malmesbury Town Hall**

**Present:**

Les Baker	Residents Association
Graham Cook	C of C
Cllr Martin Snell	TC
David Butcher	C of C
Phil Rice	Deputy Town Clerk
Cllr W. Blake	TC
Lesley Thomas	C of C – Secretary
Alan Woodward	C of C – President
Cllr C. Reid	NWDC
Cllr P. Hutton	NWDC
Cllr J. Hartless	NWDC
Cllr S. Parker	NWDC
Cllr T. Clements	NWDC
Cllr R. Sanderson	NWDC

Malmesbury Population – 5094

Parking Spaces:	Burnham Road	17	LS
	Cross Hayes	120	2 hrs
	Station Road	132	LS

The parking structure in Malmesbury is different to the other towns, in that the main central car park belongs to WCC, and the long stay car park some distance away from the centre at the foot of the hill belongs to NWDC.

The charges in both car parks have doubled recently, and there has never been a free hour parking anywhere since charges were introduced.

Although they had no evidence to back up their assertions they felt that half an hour free parking would benefit small businesses in the town centre.

The long stay car park is used by employees of the town, as most of shops and businesses do not have parking. This takes up spaces which could be used by visitors to the town. No shops refunded parking charges, although the Chamber of Commerce had considered it.

There are a reasonable number of on-street parking places, and it was felt that better lining and policing had improved the on-street parking.

Other issues raised:

- There is concern that the Surgery's move to the new out-of-town Health Centre is already having a detrimental impact on town centre businesses.
- The Chamber was concerned that lack of implementation of all the proposed redesign and improvements to the long stay car park have had a negative impact on parking availability.
- Provision for tourists was felt to be very important, and two coach parking places were not enough.
- There is a need to investigate more out of town parking provision, again to support tourism.
- The Town Council are keen to take over management of car parking under the Unitary Council.

## **9. Meeting with Wootton Bassett Town Council and Chamber of Commerce, Wootton Bassett Civic Centre**

### **Present:**

Jonathon Bourne	Town Clerk
Cllr Mike Leighfield	WB TC
Cllr John Allen	WB TC & C of C
Jonathon Loader	President – C of C
Cllr C. Reid	NWDC
Cllr T. Clements	NWDC
Cllr C. Wannell	NWDC

Wootton Bassett Population – 10,936

Parking Spaces:	Borough Fields	255	LS
	Wood Street	30	LS
	High Street (CC)	150	unrestricted

- Q1. When car parking charges were introduced Wootton Bassett was given two hours' free parking in the NWDC Boroughfields Car Park. This concession was because of the difficulties the traders in the town faced due to their close proximity to Swindon.

The Chamber of Commerce believes the impact of the charges has been considerable. It conducted a survey of 125 High Street businesses in February 2008, with a response rate of 52%. The questionnaire was one page with multiple choices, and responses were from small businesses. No response or evidence was offered from Iceland, Somerfield and Sainsbury.



A significant number of businesses (30) reported a decrease in trading of 6-10% as a result of the loss of the free two hours in Boroughfields. When asked the cause of the trading downturn, parking charges and trader parking in the (unrestricted) High Street were given as the two main reasons.

There was no evidence as to whether this downturn had remained constant since the charges were introduced.

- Q2. It was stated that the section of Boroughfields Car Park not serving Sainsbury was generally much underused since the loss of the free two hours, with consequent pressure on the High Street and considerable congestion in adjacent residential streets.
- Q3. Up to 15 retailers offer to reimburse the 30p first hour charge in Boroughfields for a spend of £10, and Sainsburys offer 30p for a spend of £20.
- Q4. All present were concerned by the slow progress (over several years) to line and restrict parking on the High Street. They wish to have parking there restricted to two hours, with no return for a further two hours.

The Chamber wishes to see the return of two hour free parking in Boroughfields and an area of Boroughfields to be allocated to trade permit holders, the permits to be held by the businesses not the workers, with permits to be a maximum cost of £1 per day.

There are problems with people working in Swindon parking on the High Street and catching buses to Swindon, so they would like an official Park & Ride to be established locally.

The Clerk of the Town Council expressed his strongly-held view that car parking should be seen as an economic regeneration tool, part of a wider strategy for each town to promote business, rather than a cash cow.

This was a very angry meeting; the Chamber of Commerce and Town Council feel let down by both NWDC and WCC. The Chamber of Commerce produced a list of "broken promises" since 2000, when they feel they had held meetings, conducted surveys, and yet nothing had been achieved. They feel they have not been adequately consulted or listened to.

## **10. How other market towns across Wiltshire are addressing Car Parking charging issues**

- 10.1 We gather a piece of work on the comparative figures is being/has been carried out by the County Council. The Task Group has requested this information, but has not received it. It will be circulated if and when it arrives. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are wide variations in parking policies across the four Districts and the County.
- 10.2 Cricklade was not included in this survey as they have no paying car parks; however, they wished to express concern regarding car parking arrangements in Cricklade to the Task Group. Currently they have only one small free car park and are very anxious for action to be taken to provide better parking facilities.

## **11. Further Evidence – North Wiltshire Retail Needs Assessment Survey September 2007**

- 11.1 The relevant chapter from the North Wiltshire Retail Needs Assessment is attached as Appendix 1. This indicates the significance of car parking and charging issues in the towns, both from the traders and a survey of pedestrians.

## 12. Conclusions

- 12.1 This was an issue which aroused very strong feelings at each of the meetings from both Town Councillors and Chambers of Commerce, and each community was anxious to point out the particular problems generated in their town. There was considerable appreciation that Councillors from NWDC had come to seek their views on these issues.

### Conclusions from the Task Group Questions

- 12.2 All the towns reported a downturn in businesses, as a result of the loss of the free one or two hours, which is slowly coming back. Chippenham, with the greatest volume of retail trade, was the least affected, and the greatest impact seemed to be felt in Wootton Bassett and Corsham. Malmesbury, which had not had a free hour, had its own parking issues.
- 12.3 It was difficult to find evidence from the larger multiples with the exception of Somerfield in Corsham.
- 12.4 All the towns noted an impact on parking in residential areas, and with the exception of Chippenham, increased numbers of empty spaces in the long stay car parks, particularly in Corsham, Calne and Wootton Bassett.
- 12.5 Only Corsham and Wootton Bassett had a number of shops still offering to refund car parking charges, which is an indication of the severity of the impact on these two towns.

## 13. General Conclusions

- 13.1 It was clear that many businesses in the small market towns are trading on the margins, and are vulnerable to quite small fluctuations in trade.
- 13.2 The lack of coherence and comparability of the parking position in each town before the imposition of parking charges has led to a chaotic picture across the District.
- 13.3 The availability of car parking spaces in the towns is an issue. Calne is particularly complex, as Sainsbury control 270 spaces in the heart of the town, leased from NWDC and Somerfield has approx. 60 spaces alongside its shoppers only spaces, which are used by the general public free of charge. Only 70 spaces are owned and charged by NWDC.
- Each town obviously has a hinterland of varying size which accesses its services and uses its car parks, but a comparison of the population figures and the number of spaces available shows interesting variations. Corsham in particular has a significant shortfall in the number of available spaces, and Wootton Bassett loses many spaces on a daily basis as a result of Swindon commuter parking. This is a contributory factor to the parking problems in these towns

	<u>Population</u>	<u>Spaces</u>
Chippenham	33,189	1,196
Calne	13,789	440
Corsham	11,318	327
Wootton Bassett	10,936	435
Malmesbury	5,094	269

- 13.4 In Malmesbury and Wootton Bassett where car parks are owned both by NWDC and WCC there has been a lack of joint planning and working, which does seem to be being finally resolved in Wootton Bassett.
- 13.5 All the towns felt it was unfair that low paid shop workers had to pay standard rates to park, buy an expensive season ticket, or cause congestion in residential streets.

- 13.6 Each town has its own economic, historical and geographical differences, which were felt keenly, and the participants felt were not fully recognised by NWDC and WCC. It was inevitable that the Town Council was drawn into these issues.

Calne - feels competition from Devizes and Chippenham, and sees the combination of traffic congestion and the parking issues to be its major problems.

Chippenham – The town least affected by these parking charge issues, but a general lack of parking spaces is a problem.

Corsham – Here the layout of the town, with the High Street adjacent to a historic garden in Corsham Court has led to a shortage of parking spaces, that there is an overflow into its narrow residential streets. Its main problems are a very large Sainsbury 1½ miles away creaming off a substantial amount of business, and the lack of any parking spaces owned by the town centre supermarket.

Malmesbury – Is a very densely built small town on a hill, so shortage of central parking is a major problem, the town is a tourist centre and this puts further pressure on parking. There is no supermarket parking in the centre of the town

Wootton Bassett – Has serious problems with High Street parking and faces serious competition from Swindon, particularly Asda in West Swindon, Sainsbury, Walmart and the Swindon outlet village.

- 13.7 None of the towns expressed a wish to go back to free car parking, all accepted it was a way of limiting use of a scarce resource, but all, with the exception of Chippenham, wanted to return to at least a free half hour if not an hour. Wootton Bassett would prefer to return to a free two hours.
- 13.8 There was little enthusiasm for the suggestion of hypothecation of car parking revenue for public transport developments.
- 13.9 There is no coherent approach to limited on-street parking across the district. Indeed, in some towns it causes significant problems. If properly managed, and if residential parking is taken into account, it can help with traffic management.
- 13.10 The main conclusion from this necessarily limited piece of work is that “**one size does not fit all**”, each town having its own particular issues and problems, and wishing to manage its own parking including charges to reflect these differences. There was widespread support for the view that car parking should be seen as a tool for economic regeneration not just a source of revenue.

## 14. Recommendations

**For both the Implementation Executive and the Unitary Authority:**

- 14.1 **Car parking charging policy must take account of local conditions and needs.**
- 14.2 **No new charging policy should be introduced without detailed consultation with each community.**
- 14.3 **Consultation should be carried out either through the Area Board or the relevant Town/Parish Council and should take into account the market viability of each town.**
- 14.4 **There should be consideration of the options for Town/Parish/Area Board Management of parking including charging by either:**

- a) **Transferring the assets to the Town/Parish**
- b) **Leasing the assets to the Town/Parish**
- c) **Management of parking against a Service Level Agreement**

**14.5. Car parking including charging must be seen as a tool of economic regeneration, as part of a wider strategy for each town to promote business.**

**14.6 There should not be a single parking charging scheme for the whole of Wiltshire.**

**We would request a response to these recommendations from the Lead Member in WCC Cabinet with responsibility for car parking, and the newly appointed Lead Officer, Alan Feist.**

Copies of the report, if agreed by the North Wiltshire District Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee, will be sent to the Chambers of Commerce and Town Councils who participated, to members of the Implementation Executive of Wiltshire Council and to the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Transition Board.

### **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank all the people who gave evidence to the Task Group, and the Officers for their clerical support.

The Chair would like to thank the Members of the Task Group, particularly Cllr Clements who was able to attend every meeting and Cllr Parker whose help in taking notes of the meetings was invaluable.

All the raw data presented to the Task Group, including photographs and surveys is available for inspection.

<b>Appendices:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Appendix 1 – The North Wiltshire Retail Needs Assessment Study – September 2007</b> <b>Tym and Partners Planners and Development Economists</b> <b>Chapter 2 – Town Centre Reviews</b></li> </ul>
<b>Background Documents Used in the Preparation of this Report:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Evidence submitted by Town Councils and Chamber of Commerce</b></li> </ul>

### **Previous Decisions Connected with this Report**

<b>Report</b>	<b>Committee &amp; Date</b>	<b>Minute Reference</b>
<b>None</b>		