

Extract From minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 14 April 2016

1. General – (4) Public Speaking in relation to Stratford to Long Marston Greenway: introduction of car parking charges.

Councillor Izzi Seccombe (Leader of the Council and Chair of Cabinet) welcomed members of the public who had registered to speak on item 2 “Stratford to Long Marston Greenway: Introduction of Car Parking Charges”.

Lizzie Stevens informed Cabinet that she was a resident of Old Town Mews, Stratford upon Avon and one of the community volunteers that open and close the gates at the Greenway car park. Having expressed her support for the Greenway Rota Group’s submission opposing the introduction of parking charges circulated previously to members of Cabinet, Mrs Stevens stated that the introduction of charging would lead to the significant displacement of cars onto the residential streets in the south of the town. This had been the experience of other parts of the country such as Ipswich, Molesey and Gwynedd. Members’ attention was drawn to photographs of existing parking problems along Wetherby Way. It was emphasised that the Greenway is close to the town centre and its car park attracts motorists wishing to visit the town as well as the Greenway. The introduction of charges will lead to “parking creep” as motorists seek opportunities to park for free. On-street parking can cause problems for emergency services if they need to gain access to roads around the south of the town. Finally, the loss of good will by the Greenway Rota Volunteers would lead to the car park gates being left open with an attendant increase in antisocial behaviour at night time.

Roger Hollerton, a Greenway Rota Volunteer challenged the report produced by the Warwickshire Observatory to inform Cabinet’s decision. Mr Hollerton stated that the report lacked detail regarding the site visits undertaken to establish levels of usage. This had concluded that usage was consistent. He added that the local volunteers had undertaken a series of spot checks that revealed that usage of the car park is dependent on the weather. Mr Hollerton questioned whether people will be prepared to pay one pound to park for one hour and whether the proposed charges will lead to a displacement of 25% of current users. It was stated that whilst the introduction of charges will lead to revenue income it will lead to increased costs to other public services including the Police. It was noted that the local MP, District Councillor and County Councillors all oppose the scheme.

Mike Watkins, a local resident, challenged the report before Cabinet on the basis that it made no reference to government guidance on off street parking. It was stated that the Greenway is not a country park in the traditional sense and is effectively a public bridleway. The car park is in the urban area and should not be regarded in the same way as one in a rural area. Members’ attention was drawn to the March 2015 Department for Transport document “Operational Guidance to Local Authorities: Parking Policy and Enforcement”. This states that local authorities should have a clear idea of their policies and that car parking should not be used as a local tax. In addition, any system of charging will result in back office charges that will reduce the financial benefits to the Council. Members of the public were thanked for their contributions.

2. Stratford to Long Marston Greenway: Introduction of Car Parking Charges

Councillor Jeff Clarke (Portfolio Holder for Environment) introduced this item reminding Cabinet that this matter had last been considered in July 2015. At that time the matter was deferred due to concerns over the information provided on usage and the projected outcomes for the Council. Since that time the Warwickshire Observatory has undertaken a considerable amount of work monitoring peak and off-peak usage of the car park. Councillor Clarke stated that he was sensitive to the fact that the introduction of parking charges would invoke strong views but added that the County Council was now in a different position from that in 2007 and 2010. Savings are required and if the Greenway is to be properly maintained the resources for this have to be secured from somewhere.

Other members of Cabinet and of the County Council contributed to the discussion. It was suggested that given the proximity to Stratford town centre, consideration should be given to the car park being treated as standard off-street parking. It was questioned whether residents' parking permits would relieve the parking problems in the streets close to the Greenway whilst the displacement of early morning dog-walkers away from the car park was considered unadvisable.

Councillor Jenny Fradgley (County Councillor for Stratford South) expressed her concerns over the proposal to introduce charges, explaining how parking displacement would impact on the roads close to the Greenway. Councillor Kate Rolfe (County Councillor for Stratford South) reminded Cabinet that if charges were introduced, the work of the Greenway Rota Volunteers would cease. This, she suggested, would lead to an increase in anti-social behaviour at the car park with an attendant increase of demand on Police resources. It was noted that the consultation exercise had been based on a minimum charge of 50p but paragraph 3.5 of the report refers to a minimum charge of £1.

Councillor Alan Cockburn (Deputy Leader) proposed that if Cabinet were to agree to the introduction of charges the impact of these should be reviewed after six months. Councillor Peter Butlin (Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning) added that the use of residents' parking permits could be explored further whilst Councillor Izzi Seccombe stressed the need to secure revenue for the upkeep of the Greenway.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse (Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group) sought assurance that any money raised from the parking charges would be directed at the upkeep of the Greenway. In response he was informed that the country parks are supported (and maintained) from a single budget with resources directed where they are required.

Councillor Jeff Clarke responded to the points raised, welcoming the proposal for an evaluation and confirming that any charges should commence with a minimum of 50p.

Resolved

1. That Cabinet approves the introduction of parking charges at the Stratford on Avon to Long Marston Greenway.
2. That the minimum charge for parking should be 50p and not £1 as stated in the report
3. That there is an evaluation 6 months after the implementation of the scheme on the impact of introducing charges and of displacement parking.