

**Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of Communities Overview and Scrutiny
Committee held on 3 May 2016**

Present:

Members of the Committee

Councillors Chris Clark, Corinne Davies, Jenny Fradgley, Philip Johnson (Chair), Joan Lea, Mike Perry, Wallace Redford, Kate Rolfe, Jenny St John and Chris Williams

Portfolio Holder

Councillor Jeff Clarke, Portfolio Holder for Environment

Other Councillors

Councillor Mike Brain.

Officers

Phil Evans, Head of Community Services
Monica Fogarty, Strategic Director, Communities Group
Stuart Ikeringill, Heritage and Environment Manager
Ian Marriott, Corporate Legal Service Manager
Garry Palmer, Team Leader Parking Management
Janet Purcell, Democratic Services Manager
Mark Ryder, Head of Transport and Economy

Public

There were five members of the public present. Mr Mike Watkins, resident of Old Town Mews made representations on behalf of the Greenway Rota Group (see minute 2 below).

1. General

(1) Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Sarah Boad, Yousef Dahmash and Mike Gittus. Councillors Kate Rolfe, Chris Williams and Mike Perry respectively had been appointed to the Committee for this meeting.

(2) Members' Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

2. Call-in: Stratford to Long Marston Greenway: Introduction of car parking charges

The meeting had been convened to consider the decision made by Cabinet on 14 April to introduce parking charges at the Stratford on Avon to Long Marston Greenway. The decision had been called-in by four members for review by the Committee.

Public Questions

Mr Mike Watkins, resident of Old Town Mews and representative for the Greenway Rota Group, drew the Committee's attention to the Rota Group's submission that set out observations on the decision of Cabinet on 14 April, and the following two questions that he wished members consider:

Q1 'Is it settled WCC policy/practice that, even in the case of discretionary services, the opportunity to raise an uncertain, indeterminate and comparatively small amount of money should inevitably override any implications for other WCC departments, for other local authorities and for local residents?'

Q2 'Does the Committee consider that the decision making process adopted by the Cabinet on 14 April 2016 was such that council tax payers can have faith in its outcome?'

Mr Watkins added that he would like the issue to be debated by the full Council.

(The questions and submission had been emailed to members the previous week and paper copies made available at the meeting).

Councillor Jeff Clarke, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Environment, advised that the nine members of Cabinet represented all areas of the County and that he was confident that they had good knowledge, listened to all views and had given serious consideration to this issue. He believed that the public can have faith in the decision making process which included this ability for members to call-in decisions for further consideration.

Concerns from members who had called-in the decision

Councillor Kate Rolfe raised the following concerns regarding introduction of parking charges:

1. The original consultation on charging had included the proposal to charge a minimum of 50p but the report to Cabinet in April recommended a £1 minimum charge, which had not been consulted on. Councillor Rolfe questioned whether the recommendation to Cabinet was valid.

2. It could prove a false economy as it will increase cost to the Police to deal with dangerous parking, there will be the cost of wardens and cost of having someone open and close the gates. If the gates are not locked the anti-social behaviour will return
3. Residents will seek mitigation measures which will force parking problem onto outlying streets. There is a need, instead, for an holistic approach to Stratford and members had been discussing a traffic management plan.
4. Free access to The Greenway supports the Council's health and wellbeing agenda, in providing for walking and it is the only safe place for cycling.
5. There is no benefit in charging and it will make the parking problem worse for residents.
6. The proposed permit price of £36 per annum is much lower than elsewhere and will encourage commuter parking.

Councillor Jenny Fradgley raised the following concerns:

1. There is not a complete understanding of the effect of displacement parking. The Greenway is within the curtilage of the town and displacement parking is likely to occur on the immediate vicinity but also lead to a ripple effect to other roads.
2. It is unlikely that once the machines are in place they will be removed following evaluation and this approach was, in any case, costly and it was better to understand the consequences and cost of implementation before anything is put in place.
3. There is no certainty that a company will take on the contract and the cost of setting up and maintaining the contract has not been made clear (either for in-house or external).
4. The original reason for gating the parking area was to stop anti-social behaviour and local volunteers had been opening and shutting the gates and keeping an eye on the area all year round.

Councillor Mike Brain made the following points:

1. The introduction of charges will be a retrograde step and even though Cabinet had agreed to the minimum charge being 50p, most will be paying more because they will be staying 2 hours or more.
2. Charging at Milcote will lead to more parking on the lane verges.
3. People will change their parking habits to the Long Marston end of the Greenway where it will put more pressure on the verges.

4. Money from the charges will go into a central pot and will not necessarily benefit the Greenway.

Views from Committee members in support of the Cabinet proposal

1. Residents only/private signs can help to deter inappropriate parking, even though the signs are not enforceable.
2. Charging may encourage more people to walk/cycle to the Greenway rather than use their cars and is part of ensuring sustainability.
3. The income is needed to keep the parking area and country parks maintained.
4. The evaluation period will enable assessment and further consideration should there be a negative impact.
5. It is fair to charge at all country parks and not have this exception.

The following areas were discussed in debate:

Charging options

Phil Evans, Head of Community Services, advised that consultation had been based on a 50p minimum charge and the observations from the public had been taken into account in the feedback to Cabinet. The recommendation had been to adopt £1 minimum charge but the report included both the 50p and £1 option and Cabinet chose the 50p option.

The Chair questioned why introducing an annual permit would increase the likelihood of commuter parking at the Greenway as there was not a problem whilst it is free. Councillor Rolfe replied that the car park was not well known to commuters at present but would become so once the permit is made known.

Financial Business Case and Implementation

Councillor Jenny St John referred to the submission from the Rota Group which indicated that the Greenway was 'in profit' and questioned whether there was a risk that the projected income would be cancelled out by the cost of implementation. Councillor Chris Clark also asked for an explanation of why charges were being introduced.

Councillor Jeff Clarke advised the meeting that none of the Country Parks operated at a profit. The income is offset by expenditure. Phil Evans reminded

members that it is a discretionary service and that the Country Parks Service had an income target and parking charges were in place at all other country parks. The income is important to maintain the parks. The figures given in the Rota Group submission (Appendix C of the report) indicated a profit because it did not include all costs, in particular staffing costs. Councillor Jeff Clarke advised that the cost of implementation of charging on the Greenway would be around £3,500 plus around £8,600 for equipment.

The Chair asked how long it would take to implement. The Committee was advised that much depended on securing the electricity supply but the aim was to be within two months to ensure evaluation over the busier summer months.

Resident parking

The question of mitigation measures was discussed. It was noted that the policy is that residential parking permits are not normally provided where residents have driveways/off street parking but if there was a displacement problem then this could be considered. Councillors Rolfe and Fradgley expressed the view that obtaining mitigation measures takes time and resources and can also lead to further overspill problems in other roads.

Conclusion

Councillor Kate Rolfe expressed the wish for a more holistic approach to this issue and proposed that the consideration of this item be referred to full Council for broader discussion and debate. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Chris Clark and the proposal agreed, the voting being 5 for and 4 against.

Resolved

That the Cabinet decision in relation to the introduction of car parking charging on Stratford to Long Marston Greenway be referred to Council for consideration.

The Committee rose at 3.25 p.m.

.....
Chair