

Annex One to the Strategic Approach to Parking

Section One: Background Information

Basingstoke Town Centre and its immediate environs provide a total of 5570 off street car parking spaces.

- 2775 within Festival Place and are not within the direct control of the Borough Council.
- 915 operated by South West Trains at Basingstoke Railway Station.
- 160 at the Leisure Park to support the Centre Shuttle Park and Ride service.
- 1120 within the Borough Council's ownership are provided in surface level car parks in and adjacent to the town centre.
- 600 to support 'The Malls'.

Motorcycle parking is available free of charge in a number of locations within Basingstoke Town Centre.

The Borough Council also owns and manages car parks in Tadley, Whitchurch, Overton, Kingsclere and Bramley which are free of charge.

Detailed information regarding Public Car Parks within the Borough can be viewed at www.basingstoke.gov.uk/services/parking/carparks.htm.

As can be seen from Appendix 1 charging for parking varies considerably both within Basingstoke town centre (between council owned and privately managed facilities) and in comparison with other centres (including Reading, Guildford, Southampton, Newbury, Winchester, Camberley, Test Valley and Portsmouth). Charging within the Borough Council's car parks is on the whole cheaper than most other centres assessed and in comparison with, for example, Festival Place.

Public consultations with residents, businesses and organisations took place during the winter/spring of 2006/07 which included a number of parking related questions. The results of these consultations were included within the report 'A Vision for Central Basingstoke' published in December 2007. The outcome of the consultations raised a number of interesting, but potentially conflicting results. For example, 30% of respondents felt that current car parking arrangements and locations made them feel good about Basingstoke. However the 'consumers' surveyed felt that one of the main problems associated with transport was there was not enough parking. However other responses suggested that parking is generally thought to be plentiful and its cost was not a significant consideration to most, although some would always wish for more free parking. Once in town, the survey identified that a significant number of visitors to Festival Place never go outside that shopping centre.

Section 2: Consideration of Parking Activities and Issues

2.1 Managing demand and encouraging a range of transport choices

Parking policy can have a significant effect on the decisions that people make in choosing how they travel to their intended destination but only if there are practical alternatives to the car and dependent on the perceived affordability of those alternatives. For some journeys the car may be the only realistic mean of transport available to people in which case the cost of parking can influence their choice of destination – for example for shopping and leisure activities. This is particularly relevant in areas such as Basingstoke and Deane where access to alternatives such as public transport can be limited or not available at all.

Additionally, the pressures that high car ownership can create on the existing road network need to be taken into account. Managing traffic growth will be an on-going challenge particularly when we consider the focus on Basingstoke in terms of housing and economic growth and the complexity of commuting patterns that exist within the wider sub-regional area.

Consequently, there are a number of aspects that need to be considered. For example, we need to achieve a balance between meeting the needs of existing business and securing inward-investment to enhance economic prosperity and the physical regeneration of some of our key employment areas whilst not generating significantly more traffic on our roads at peak times. This is because high levels of traffic can itself impact on the attractiveness of the borough as a place to invest as well as the consequential impacts in relation to climate change, and severance of communities.

We also need to think about the importance of maintaining and enhancing the attractiveness of Basingstoke town centre as a retail and cultural / leisure hub. Ease and cost of parking can influence peoples' decisions on where they will spend their leisure time. These decisions can affect the vitality and viability of town centres. This is particularly important when considering the range of choices that exist for both Basingstoke and Deane residents as well as those in Hampshire and the wider Thames Valley in terms of the town centres that they have access to.

2.2 Types of Parking Provision

Commuter Parking

This focuses on those car users who use their car for only one part of their journey. The most common type of commuter parking is that provided at railway stations to allow for their onward journey by train. Basingstoke station has the second highest level of access by car users of any station in Hampshire. While a high proportion of journeys associated with commuter rail travel tend to occur during the early morning peak, these continue throughout the day and into the early evening. The parking provided by the rail companies is frequently full by the end of the morning peak and an increasing proportion of train users now rely on other car parks or on-street parking.

Parking at the borough's other stations at Whitchurch, Overton and Bramley is considered to be inadequate to support current demand and the Borough Council is working with partners to seek to address this deficiency.

Whilst longer-distance commuter travel by rail should be supported because of its role in reducing longer journeys by car this can have local impacts. For example, journeys by car can have an impact on the capacity of the local road network and its operation, particularly in the morning peak period, which can have consequences in terms of the attractiveness of our own major employment areas within the vicinity of the station (including Basing View). Parking to support rail travel can also impact on local roads in the area as some commuters' use on-street parking within walking distance of railway stations.

Long Stay Parking

Long stay parking is usually considered to be parking for more than three hours duration and tends to focus on people who park on a regular basis for work when there is no or little parking available at their place of work. This is a common situation for those who have jobs located in town centres. The Borough Council currently provides a number of options for regular long-stay parkers including a pre-payment Parking Card (which provides for all-day discounted parking) as well as season tickets and business permits. There is likely to be a continued demand for such parking, in relation to employees within Basingstoke town centre and in other employment centres, as opportunities for providing new spaces will be limited. A Business Parking Permit pilot is planned for implementation in 2008/09 in the Houndmills area. This has been developed following concerns raised by a number of businesses with limited on-site parking. The concerns were raised in response to initial proposals by the Borough Council for managing road safety issues which had resulted from unrestricted on-street parking, in part caused by overspill parking from those businesses.

The demand for business parking in Basingstoke Town Centre will need to be given within the overall context of levels of parking provision within the town centre to

balance the needs of local employers against the needs of people using the town centre for retail and leisure activities. In addition consideration should be given to the development of area wide travel planning schemes for all our major employment areas.

Short Stay Parking

Short-stay parking (less than three hours duration) is essential to the vitality of centres including Basingstoke town and other centres. Pricing mechanisms for off-street parking, in conjunction with on-street parking restrictions, have a role to play in ensuring that enough short-stay spaces exist for residents and visitors.

Those who use short-stay spaces more often than not wish to park close to their destination so the location and ease of access to short-stay spaces contributes to the attractiveness or otherwise of the centre they are visiting. In general terms the focus of activity for users of short stay parking is for shopping, and visiting more central services such as banks and post offices. These visits play an important role in supporting town centre vitality and therefore it is important that we maintain the right amount of short stay parking in the right place.

Residents' On-Street Parking

A particular issue for residential areas close to town centres is the competition for on-street parking spaces created by commuter and town centre workers. This tension is often created because lack of off-street parking available to many older properties in town and village centres across the borough results in residents parking on-street. However, during week days town centre workers and commuters often use on-street parking rather than car parks either for cost or accessibility reasons. In such cases the Borough Council can and does implement formal arrangements to manage on-street parking on the basis of highway safety or residential amenity.

The Borough Council is proposing to undertake two pilots (in the northern part of Whitchurch and in the Stukeley Road area of Basingstoke) which will be trialling a criteria based approach towards a more equitable distribution of residents parking permits. This is testing an approach based on analysis of need as opposed to demand. The first stage in taking these pilots forward will involve undertaking or has involved a consultation with local residents.

Parking for the Mobility Impaired

The provision of parking for the mobility impaired is supported in central Basingstoke through the Shopmobility Scheme and in specified areas such as Church Street. In addition most of our public car parks make provision for parking spaces for the mobility impaired and our residential and non-residential parking standards require the provision of spaces to be specifically designed and designated for those with

mobility impairment. It is important to ensure that our current approach to support and provision of parking for the mobility impaired continues to meet the needs of users.

The Borough Council also supports, where appropriate, the provision of on-street parking bays for the mobility impaired in residential roads.

2.3 Quality and Image of Car Parks

A car user's first impression of a centre is often created by how easy it is to access parking, the quality of the car park itself, and how easy it is to get from the car park to their initial destination. Peoples' expectations of standards in car parks have changed significantly in recent times. Matters such as the visual quality of the car park, standard of lighting as well as CCTV provision are important ingredients in terms of how users view the attractiveness and usability of a car park from both personal safety and vehicle security perspective. A number of car parks within Basingstoke town centre hold 'Parkmark' safer parking awards.

How people pay for parking is increasingly becoming an important aspect of the parking experience. Payment on return to the car is often seen as more attractive than by prepayment on arrival, since the user doesn't need to decide in advance their length of stay. This has the added benefit for the local economy as the user may be more likely to stay longer than originally intended because they have been attracted to use additional local facilities. However, it should be recognised that this can also have the effect of reducing the overall capacity of a car park.

Alternatives to paying by cash are also increasingly becoming important, particularly for long stay or higher priced parking where the visitor may not have sufficient loose change. This combined with improvements in technology people means that people have greater expectations of having choice in how they pay for parking (e.g. credit cards, SMS texting and Smart cards). For many paying cash is becoming less convenient and a potential frustration. Both payment on return and 'cashless' payments can also have security benefits for both the user and the operator.

2.4 Car Parks in Smaller Centres

Car parking in smaller centres has an important role to play in enabling people to access essential services. Access to shops for day-to-day needs in district centres such as Chineham and Brighton Hill and in towns such as Tadley are often supported by free parking provided by the retailers.

However, local shops in outlying centres (both within Basingstoke and the more rural areas) also provide an important role in providing for day to day needs and reducing the need for longer journeys, with benefits in terms of road congestion and carbon emissions. The retailers themselves in these smaller centres in turn rely on regular trade to maintain their viability.

At present Borough Council car parks in these locations are free. The question of whether to charge for such provision has to be considered against a number of factors including:

- The potential impact of overspill parking into local roads;
- The potential impact on local trade;
- The potential impact of diverting potential visitors to alternative locations;
- The cost of installing and maintaining charging mechanisms, and enforcement.

2.5 Quantity and Location of Car Parks

The quantity and location of parking that is available to users is a critical part of the supporting infrastructure for towns such as Basingstoke if they are to maintain their attractiveness as a destination. A critical matter for consideration in central Basingstoke, for example, is the need to ensure that the vitality and viability of the centre is maintained by ensuring that sufficient parking is made available to support its role as a regional retail and cultural / leisure centre. However, there is also a need to maximise opportunities to enhance the physical environment of the town centre.

One aspect that provides an opportunity to enhance the attractiveness of some parts of the centre is linked to the approach taken to surface level parking. This parking provides an important role in supporting short-stay parking which is critical for some of the smaller businesses in areas such as Top of the Town and providing access to necessary services such as banking facilities and the Post Office. However, surface level parking is often fragmented, or located within services yards where there can be pressure and conflict when loading and unloading is taking place, and is not efficient in terms of the use of land. Some of the surface level car parks are located in areas which provide an important visual setting for the Town Centre. It is important therefore that opportunities to secure visual improvements to these areas and make better use of the land should be explored in support of the wider objectives of the Central Basingstoke Vision. In addition there may be opportunities to rationalise points of access and secure the combined use of key central sites including some sites that are currently in private use.

Monitoring the level of capacity that exists across the spectrum of parking provision within the town centre should be used to inform the potential opportunities and approaches for redevelopment of some of the Borough Council's more visible car parks and not unnecessarily inhibit the wider design opportunities that would be potentially constrained if a 'quid pro quo' of provision were insisted upon in any redevelopment proposals. The Council's own provision needs to be considered in the context of the overall needs for parking within the town centre using patronage information and planning in the longer term for the provision of additional parking in

the most appropriate locations if a need is demonstrated. An understanding of how car parks which might be included within redevelopment proposals are currently used is important. For example, it may be considered appropriate to provide an element of parking restricted to very short stay use to ensure that variety can still be provided to support a range of needs and activities.

Assessing the supply of parking should be undertaken in conjunction with assessing when the peak periods of demand are and understanding the impacts on the wider road network at peak shopping times for example. In addition we should consider whether there are other car parks in private ownership which are underutilised at these peak periods, which through negotiation with landowners may be brought into more productive use and whether there are opportunities for joint use of car parking facilities through new development proposals. Other areas such as maximising opportunities to support greater use of the Central Shuttle Bus and council owned car parks (including enhanced publicity) should also be explored.

One particular challenge facing the Borough Council in terms of the need for additional parking concerns Basing View. A number of employers currently use car parking at buildings that are vacant. New development within Basing View will have an impact on the overall availability of car parking to support town centre businesses and is a matter that requires more detailed study in order to support the regeneration of Basing View and the wider economic prosperity of the borough.

One area of user parking that also needs to be considered in relation to both quantity and location of parking relates to stop-over facilities for coaches and buses. In taking forward the Central Basingstoke Vision and supporting the desire that Basingstoke should become a 'destination of choice' from a retail, leisure and cultural perspective, some visitors may arrive as part of organised coach trips. Provision of whether additional facilities over and above those currently available should be assessed.

2.6 Fees and Charges

At present there is no clear rationale for setting Fees and Charges in the Council's own car parks. This strategic approach provides a context for ensuring that in both the short and medium term the setting of Fees and Charges for council owned car parks is undertaken within the context of wider council aims, the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, and meets agreed criteria set by the Council.

In the short-term there is a need to assess, within the Council's wider budget considerations, opportunities to enhance the quality of those car parks within the Borough Council's control and the image that is portrayed to visitors. Some investment has already been undertaken through improvements to the Alencon Link and Central car parks. Further consideration should be given to investing in improving the physical environment, widening the range of payment methods and other opportunities for improving the users experience. Recognition should also be given to the role of parking in smaller centres to support the viability of small retailers

and to acknowledge their importance as supporting access to local services where public transport is often not a viable alternative. However, these car parks still require maintenance and management.

In arriving at the criteria for setting fees and charges a major consideration is the fact that, in central Basingstoke, the majority of the off-street car parking stock (68%) falls outside of the control of the Borough Council (examples of this are Festival Place and Basingstoke Railway Station car parks). Car park users, and especially longer stay patrons, can be sensitive in terms of their choice of parking location, to comparative pricing. However, it is important that consideration is given to the charging framework that other operators implement. In addition the quality of car parks needs to be taken into account along with the role and function of the Council's car parks in both central Basingstoke and the smaller centres.

Charges in competing town centres can affect decisions on whether to visit or not, especially for residents who live further out from the town centre, and who have a reasonable choice in terms of other centres they can visit (including Reading, Newbury, Andover, Winchester, Guildford and Southampton). It is important that any review of charging in Basingstoke in particular does not result in a reduction in its attractiveness as a place to visit. However, as can be seen from Appendix 1, the current level of charging within Borough Council car parks is somewhat lower than in a large number of other town centres, and does not currently include charging on Sundays, or for disabled parking, which some other operate. Potential exists to review our charging levels and still remain competitive in relation to other centres.

Consideration should also need to be given to adopting different charging regimes in different car parks to support very short-stay (i.e. less than one hour), short stay (up to three hours) and long stay parking (over three hours) dependent on the location and characteristics of the particular car park.

Therefore, in taking forward the setting of Fees and Charges the following aspects should be taken into consideration:

- The opportunities for investing in improving the 'offer' that our car parks provide.
- Take into consideration the costs of managing and maintaining 'Free Parking'.
- Developing charging which maintains competitiveness in relation to other centres and other car parks outside of the Borough Council's control.
- In the short term review the approaches to short stay and long stay parking.

2.7 Non-residential Parking Standards

Parking Standards are used to guide the provision of parking within new development and for changes to existing developments through, for example, change of use. 'Non-residential' includes uses such as offices, industrial/warehousing, hospitals, education establishments, leisure and retail uses etc.

Different uses and locations have different requirements. For example, Basingstoke and North Hampshire Hospital lies on the edge of Basingstoke and its catchment area extends far beyond the borough's boundaries. Public transport is not a reasonable option for a large number of patients, visitors or staff (often because it does not exist or is unacceptably lengthy in terms of journey time and cost compared to car travel). There are similar challenges for some of the borough's major centres of education.

Parking Standards for non-residential uses will need to be developed taking into account the needs and location of particular uses while balancing these with environmental objectives, promotion of the use of public transport, traffic impacts on local communities and both existing and anticipated pressure on the road network.

Availability of car parking is also among the many factors that influence decisions on the location of new business investment. Retailers, for example, may not invest where parking is in short supply or overpriced.

Parking Standards could, for example, have a significant impact on investment in the regeneration of Basing View.

The role of car parking in relation to wider economic and employment objectives has been recognised in draft Planning Policy Statement 4 'Planning for Sustainable Economic Development', which proposes that "Local Planning Authorities should prepare locally specific parking policies rather than simply following maxima levels".