

# Appendix 1

## Improving Places – Preliminary Investigations

### Rotherham Town Centre – Car Parking.

	<b>Page</b>
<b>Contents</b>	
<b>Why Members wanted to undertake this work</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Methodology</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Findings</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Thanks</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Background papers</b>	<b>6</b>

## 1 Why Members wanted to undertake this work

- 1.1 The purpose of this preliminary investigation is to provide recommendations to the Advisory Cabinet and to the Commissioners on car parking in the Town Centre. The anticipated outcome from this report is to provide information and recommendations to the Improving Places Select Commission to inform a discussion on whether a detailed review is required.
- 1.2 It is part of a series of reviews being undertaken by Members of Improving Places Select Commission.
- 1.3 Town centre parking charges (and enforcement activity) generate significant income for the Council. They also have the potential to deter shoppers and visitors to the town centre, particularly in light of increasing alternative out-of-town retail sites offering free car parking
- 1.4 The Task and Finish Group have undertaken a preliminary investigation into the issues surrounding the town centre car parking charging and enforcement policies, to determine the future scope and benefits of an in-depth scrutiny review.
- 1.5 A sub group of Task & Finish Group 3 was established in August 2015 consisting of the following people

Cllr Jon Rosling	Chair
Cllr Glyn Whelbourn	
Cllr Rose McNeely	
Cllr Dave Pickering	
Mr Brian Walker	Co-optee Member
Dianne Thomas	Advisor from Local Government Association and Centre from Public Scrutiny.
Chris Majer	Scrutiny Officer.

## 2 Methodology

- 2.1 This piece of work involved meeting with the Parking Services Manager who provided answers to questions asked on the subject along with providing written information.

- 2.2 The lines of questioning were identified with the assistance of the Centre for Public Scrutiny Consultant Dianne Thomas and are based on the lines of enquiries of reviews elsewhere.

### **3 Background**

- 3.1 Since the development of Parkgate Retail World and Meadowhall Shopping Centre, Rotherham as a place to shop has struggled to attract shoppers into the Town Centre. One of the main reasons for this is both have the facility to provide free car parking on site, although the impact of this has not been proved.
- 3.2 The formulation of a Car Parking Policy is difficult due to the focus of other current policies the Council may be supporting at any one time. For example the Transportation Policy promoted the use of public transport along with encouraging employees to cycle to work, which resulted in incrementally higher car parking charges for longer stay parking activities.
- 3.3 The local economy and businesses located in the Town Centre area require increased levels of footfall and a lower or free parking tariff may help Rotherham Town Centre compete with outlying shopping centres.
- 3.4 The recent developments on what were previously Market Street Car Parks and the relocation of Tesco Supermarket from Forge Island site, illustrates the fluid nature of car parking provision in the town.

### **4 Findings**

- 4.1 The most surprising feature in the committee's discussion with the officer concerned was that the authority had no current written policy on parking provision. However, work is ongoing to formulate such a policy and this process involves consideration being given to the contribution parking provision makes to the local economy and the Council's overall Transportation Policy.
- 4.2 A report is due to be delivered to Commissioners in December 2015 which will make recommendations on tariff changes to achieve savings as well as a free Saturday parking offer.
- 4.3 The officer explained that a range of differing priorities across different departments meant formulating a clear line on parking provision was difficult. The Authority does, however, have a robust parking

enforcement policy and has had notable success in tackling Blue Badge fraud.

- 4.4 Parking decisions historically have been informed by a range of information available to officers. Amongst these are a 2012 shopper survey which featured questions on parking (although the officer acknowledged this was not the main focus of the survey); and regular two way contact with businesses through a number of forums and also through business lobbying.
- 4.5 The shopper survey from 2012 indicated that town centre customers had little issue with the quantity of parking or the cost of parking and its location. There is a range of parking at various locations around the town centre although the future availability of some of these sites, such as Forge Island, is uncertain.
- 4.6 As well as a range of locations there are a variety of charges and maximum stay restrictions in force at different sites. These range from 30 minute short stays at various sites, up to three hours at Forge Island (this was extended after business lobbying) and several sites which facilitate all day parking.
- 4.7 One aspect that did come out of the shopper survey was that parking was not necessarily the single issue that prevented people from wanting to come into Rotherham. Other reasons, such as the choice of shopping outlets, were cited – though it should be noted that this survey was conducted three years ago and that there have been significant developments in the Town Centre offer since then, particularly along High Street.
- 4.8 The group questioned the effect of free parking on Town Centre activity and was told that car park usage had increased when seasonal free parking was on offer; and that sites offering free parking had a high take up. That would imply that free parking leads to increased activity in the Town Centre, however one has to consider that the increased trade may be down to other factors i.e. seasonal trade. It was a difficult issue to assess scientifically and there were limited like for like situations in other towns locally. Barnsley local authority has a free Saturday parking offer, however Doncaster does not.
- 4.9 The officer did accept that free parking “probably” would increase economic activity and could be a positive that would benefit the town. However, he and the group felt that any move to free parking – even on a localised scale – would have to be very carefully monitored and

managed and be left in place for a some significant time in order to assess its genuine effectiveness. It should also be recognised that an “across the board” free parking offer would result in the annual surplus which is currently generated by the Parking Service being reduced from its current level of approximately £400,000 to a deficit of approximately £500,000.

- 4.10 The concept of a Business Improvement District was discussed – whereby businesses pay a premium to help towards the cost of things such as street cleaning and car parking. There is reportedly some work being done on this type of initiative elsewhere. It was highlighted that free parking was not an answer in itself – that it required a range of incentives.

## **5 Recommendations**

- 5.1 There is scope for further considerable work, over a longer period, on the issue of parking in the Town Centre. Much of this work is currently ongoing and the report to Commissioners in December will address some of the issues raised in this report.
- 5.2 There is a need to unify the various strands of approach and practice into a coherent policy on parking that reflects the different priorities of differing sections and which can provide some consistency of approach over time for officers on the matters of provision, charges and siting as well as enforcement. Any future group work should focus on the development of such a policy.
- 5.3 The authority should continue to take representations from local traders about parking in the Town Centre through existing forums; however this information should also be allied with up to date and regularly revised information from customers who use the Town Centre for shopping. Past practice has been governed by anecdotal information or out of date surveys. It needs a more thorough and scientific approach.
- 5.4 With that in mind, any free parking offer ought to be extended and carefully monitored to assess its impact in terms of increased trade and Town Centre usage. Since the review started, it has been agreed that the offer of free parking on Forge Island has now been made permanent.

- 5.5 The Members of Improving Places Select Commission should decide how best these outcomes can be measured to ensure they are consistently monitored over the long term.
- 5.6 The group may also wish to look at the feasibility of re-opening areas currently closed to traffic under the pedestrianisation of the Town Centre many years ago.
- 5.7 Further research into the feasibility of introducing a Business Improvement District into the Town Centre should be undertaken. It is part of a series of reviews being undertaken by Members of Improving Places Select Commission.
- 5.8 The results of this review and any subsequent findings should be incorporated into the Arup Masterplan for the Town Centre.

## **6 Thanks**

- 6.1 On behalf of the members of the Task and Finish Group, the Chairman, Cllr Jon Rosling would like to thank the Parking Services Manager, Martin Beard for his co-operation in this review.

## **7 Background papers**

- 7.1 Civil Parking Enforcement Policy
- 7.2 Environment & Development Service Cabinet Member for Waste and Environment meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2014
- 7.3 Environment & Development Service report to Directorate Management Team meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2015 :- Forge Island Car Park Financial and Statistical Report.