Minutes of an Extraordinary Meeting held at the Town Hall, Lowestoft on Thursday, 6 March 2014 at 6.00 pm

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillors T Sullivan (Chairman), A. Cackett, S Barker, N Brooks (substituting for P Flegg), G Catchpole, P Coghill, G Douce, G Elliott, T Goldson, K Grant, P Light, M Parsons and N Webb (substituting for S Webb)

Cabinet Member in attendance

Councillor S Ardley Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Operational Partnerships and Lowestoft Rising

Other Members in attendance

J Wheatley

Suffolk Coastal District Councillor in attendance

A Nunn

Officers present

C Barnes (Transport & Infrastructure Manager), D Gallagher (Head of Customer Services & Commercial Partnerships), I Gregory (General Manager, Waveney Norse), R Rusted (Waveney Norse) and A Stapleton (Democratic Services Officer).

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE / SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Flegg and S Webb.

Councillor N Brooks attended as a substitute for Councillor P Flegg.

Councillor N Webb attended as a substitute for Councillor S Webb.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Parsons declared a Local Non Pecuniary Interest in Item 3 – “Car Parks Update – Progress Report” - as he worked for Lowestoft Sixth Form College, which had arranged to use the Water Lane Car Park for employee parking.

3 CAR PARKS UPDATE – PROGRESS REPORT

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Operational Partnerships and Lowestoft Rising presented a report which provided the Committee with the progress to date relating to the Strategic Car Parks Review.

The Deputy Leader reported that initial meetings had been held in Halesworth and Bungay regarding the concessionary parking trials, and that stakeholder meetings for each town would continue, with further information being brought to the Committee in around three months’ time. A positive meeting had also been held with Suffolk County Council regarding car park signage, and matters would be progressed, with details of costs and designs being brought to a future meeting of the Committee.
Finally, the Deputy Leader referred to an addendum to the report regarding enforcement of litter and dog fouling, which had been requested at the last meeting of full Council, and this would be discussed at the end of the meeting, after the car parking update.

Officers then gave a presentation updating the progress on the various areas of the review. In particular the presentation covered usage figures, and options for setting charges, although with the proviso that there was little research available on the effect of pricing on usage, and also limited research on links between car park charges and the local economy. Options aimed at increasing revenue and/or increasing usage of less well used car parks were appended to the report to inform future decisions on tariff levels, and a profit and loss account for each car park, which contained commercially sensitive information, was tabled at the meeting showing the income and expenditure of each car park.

Various other options would be available to Members when making future recommendations on car park charges, such as “free from 3pm” trials, revised charging strategies on seasonal car parks, and encouraging use of less well used car parks either by amending the tariffs or improving the offer, for example by providing larger car parking bays or restricting season ticket users to higher levels.

Finally, officers referred to the report, which set out the progress to date on the recommendations arising from the January 2014 meeting of the Committee on the areas of automated enforcement systems; options for uncharged car parks; options for the disposal, redevelopment or improved performance of underperforming car parks (with seven initial disposal options); options for improved road signage; opportunities for Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) to be undertaken through Waveney Norse; feedback on the Bungay, Halesworth and Kirkley concessionary parking trials; and the costed schedule of tariff options already mentioned.

The following issues were raised during the discussion on this item:

- The Water Lane Sports and Leisure Centre Car Park was to be improved, with a net gain of c. 20 spaces, change of use of an existing grass verge to a bus lane thereby removing the need for buses to enter the car park, and creation of a staff car park to the rear of the building.

- Proposals concerning the Angel Link Car Park, Halesworth would reduce capacity from 80 spaces to 50. However, the car park was only 25% used so this would not have a major effect on availability of car parking in Halesworth.

- Following earlier reviews, some car parks, for example Kirkley Rise and Belvedere Road, were brought forward as solutions for cheap all-day parking. Additionally, free trials and half price permits were introduced in these car parks, but had not been taken up despite publicity. The Council wished to develop these initiatives, and this would be helped with the transfer of administration of the permit scheme to Waveney Norse. These two car parks had also been put into the mix for potential redevelopment, and the findings of these investigations would be brought back to the Committee in September 2014.

- Should the Council be successful in taking on responsibility for CPE, this would not result in charging for on-street parking, as this could only be done by the County Council. However, residents’ parking would continue to be charged but would be better enforced, alongside improved enforcement of incorrect parking on yellow lines and in time limited bays. Any move from on-street parking to off-street parking could easily be accommodated by the Council’s car parks.

- Details of staffing structures, including management and cash collection, would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee which considered the Car Parks Review.
There had been long standing discussions with Cefas regarding their use of the Pakefield Road Car Park, and at various times the organisation had been prevented from using the car park, had been offered concessionary parking, and at the moment it leased an area of the car park alongside an agreement to use some other spaces. Discussions were ongoing regarding the use of those other spaces being during off-peak times only, as the Council had to find a balance between the needs of a major local employer and the nearby residents, as well as income. However, the car park was never full and people tended to park on nearby roads.

Every tariff review involved benchmarking the competition, ie car parking charges in towns adjacent to the Waveney District, and analysis of trends. However, car parking charges were only one factor in influencing shopping habits, and if the offer in a particular town was sufficiently attractive, then people were willing to pay high parking charges. Waveney’s charges were relatively cheap in comparison to nearby towns. Any changes to tariffs would have an approximately 3-month lead-in time following any decision by Cabinet to amend the tariffs.

A full evaluation of the concessionary parking trials would be brought to a future meeting, including whether the right car parks were chosen for the trials. Whilst the Council knew from the ticket machines how many people were parking during the free periods, it was more difficult to ascertain whether these were new visitors to the town, or whether shoppers had simply amended their shopping times to fit in with the free periods, or had ceased parking on roads. Information from shop owners regarding increased weekly takings, not just moved from other periods of the week, would provide useful evidence of the success of the trials.

The trial of automated enforcement to be carried out at Clapham Road Car Park would cost £20,000 to implement, and a further £1,600pa maintenance costs. Although called a trial, the system was envisaged to be permanent, and the word trial referred to the results of its implementation being analysed for potential implementation in other car parks. When implemented, the scheme would only be able to monitor cars for compliance with the three-hour maximum tariff, and enforcement of 1 and 2 hour tariffs would still need to be done manually. In the future it may be possible to link the enforcement to payment for other lengths of stay by introducing new software and programming to the existing machines which would require users to input their registration numbers.

The area around the Kirkley Mill Health Centre, Clifton Road, would be monitored once the new site opened, as the 106 car parking spaces on the site may not be sufficient.

The review was not all about car parking, for example the Council taking on CPE would reduce street “clutter” from incorrectly parked vehicles, improving access for public transport, cyclists and pedestrians.

None of the car parks initially identified for potential disposal were currently charged; some were in residential areas, and others were scraps of land. The review of each by the Asset Management Group would ascertain the need for and potential future use of these car parks, with any decisions being made by the Cabinet. Some could potentially be used for affordable housing. Any change of use would then also go through the planning process. Additionally, the reduction in upkeep and overheads associated with the maintenance of these car parks through their disposal would have a positive impact on the Council’s budget, which could potentially be used to fund initiatives such as the concessionary parking trials.
• The maps of the car parks initially identified for potential disposal set out at Appendix B to the report were simply outlines of the existing car parks, and this did not mean that the entire area of any of the car parks would necessarily be disposed of or redeveloped.

• It was difficult to monitor usage of the car parks after 6pm, as any monitoring required users to take a ticket, and a ticket was not required to park from 6pm in Waveney’s car parks, although limited monitoring could be undertaken by CCTV. Additionally, restaurants in the town centres praised the fact that parking was free after 6pm and the town centre car parks were generally busy in the evenings. The review would include looking at potential improvements to evening car park provision, to benefit the night time economy.

• It was possible to estimate the loss in income from introducing a “free from 3pm” scheme in any of the car parks, by removing the current usage of the car parks from 3pm from the current income figures.

• Enforcement of those car parks where the first hour’s parking was free would be undertaken by the car parking enforcement team, although this was difficult to police with the current resources.

• Meetings were taking place with businesses which may be interested in sponsoring later opening of the Battery Green Multi Storey Car Park. Additionally, the car park was open later in the evening when the Marina Theatre expected a large audience for an event.

• The Committee was due to hear a session on Economic Development at its June 2014 meeting, and the part that car parking played in the economy of town centres would be considered as part of that session.

• Use of RinGo pay-by-phone parking was at less than 1% of users.

• The proposed improved signage was aimed at making car parks easier for users to locate, but would not be illuminated or linked to use, as such signs were costly and were not thought necessary.

At the end of the discussion of the report, and before the recommendations were moved, the Chairman suggested that he write to Suffolk County Council to express the Council’s wish for early progression of the evaluation of Civil Parking Enforcement and the Council’s aim for this to be undertaken by the District Council. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Operational Partnerships and Lowestoft Rising added that he would be happy to add his name to such a letter.

Additionally, where the recommendations referred to progress being reported back to the Committee in June or September 2014, this may be to the Committee’s scheduled meetings or, at the discretion of the Chairman and taking into account the workload of the Committee, to Extraordinary Meetings.

RESOLVED

1. That the progress relating to the Strategic Car Parks Review to date be noted.

2. That the Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system be progressed at Clapham Road Car Park, Lowestoft, from existing budgets, and that a progress report be brought back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2014.
3. That options for uncharged car parks be brought back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2014.

4. That the initial disposal options, as set out in Section 2.3 of Report REP1070, be progressed through the Council’s Asset Management Group, with any additional options arising from the ongoing review process being brought to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2014.

5. That officers work with colleagues at Suffolk County Council to progress improvements to road signs where required, with updates returning to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee when appropriate.

6. That officers work with colleagues at Suffolk County Council to ensure timely progress of the evaluation of Civil Parking Enforcement throughout Suffolk as a whole or by individual district/borough council areas.

7. That the Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Operational Partnerships and Lowestoft Rising write jointly to Suffolk County Council to express the Council’s wish for early progression of the evaluation of Civil Parking Enforcement and the Council’s aim for this to be undertaken by the District Council.

8. That feedback on the Bungay, Halesworth and Kirkley concessionary parking trials, ways to mitigate loss of income, and the review of business performance, new business start-ups and business rate income, as set out in Section 2.6 of Report REP1070, be brought back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during June 2014.

9. That the schedule of fees and charges options as attached in Appendix A to Report REP1070 be noted and that this area of the review be further progressed at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2014.

Following the vote on this report, the Head of Commercial Partnerships & Strategic Commissioning made reference to a note which had been circulated setting out the current enforcement arrangements for dealing with dog fouling and littering, following a request at the 26 February 2014 meeting of full Council that “an addendum be circulated to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 6 March 2014 to consider whether a team of enforcement staff should be employed to keep Waveney clean through the enforcement of litter and dog fouling, with any recommendations being referred to the Cabinet”.

It was considered that this was too large an issue to be considered at this meeting, and would merit a separate hearing, with the involvement of the Head of Environmental Services and Port Health and the Cabinet Member for Community Health & Safety, as well as other relevant staff. It was therefore:

RESOLVED

That relevant officers and Cabinet Members attend a meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to discuss the current position with regard to the enforcement of dog fouling and littering, and to look at options to address concerns.

The meeting was concluded at 7.45 pm

Chairman