

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16th February 2004

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Harrington (Chair), Councillor Bambrick (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Lane and Mrs. Mead.

Conservative Group

Councillors Hood, Lemmon and Martin.

Derbyshire County Council

A. Watson (Area Traffic and Safety Officer).

In Attendance

S. Haslett (Anti-Social Behaviour Officer), S. Wilson, (Acting Inspector, Swadlincote Police) and E. Banton (Police Liaison Officer).

CYS/41. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 1st December 2003 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

CYS/42. **CAR PARKING STUDY - SCOPE**

At its Meeting on 1st December 2003, the Committee, in considering its future work programme had agreed to investigate aspects of off-street car parking in the District with a view to setting the terms of reference for this study.

Accordingly, invitations had been despatched to all Members, Senior Managers, adjacent local authorities, the County Council, Parish Councils, the Local Crime and Disorder Partnership, Derbyshire Chamber, the Derbyshire Association of Local Councils, Market Initiatives, SLM, Sainsbury's, Somerfield and the Tamworth Co-operative. Whilst this list was not exhaustive, it was felt that this initial consultation would allow consideration of the terms of reference for any future study. The views which had been received from the consultees were reported verbally at the Meeting. Feedback provided commented on levels of provision, sustainable transport, community safety, charging regimes and links to the local economy. A summary of the responses was also circulated.

It was noted that East Staffordshire Borough Council (ESBC) and North West Leicestershire District Council (NWLDC) had recently undertaken reviews of car parking in their respective districts. East Staffordshire Borough Council's Scrutiny Panel's wide ranging view encompassed the Council's policy role, administration of charges and fines, enforcement, quality and appearance, costs and concluded with a series of recommendations to improve the service. NWLDC, following a feasibility study undertaken by District Audit was currently considering the introduction of a charging regime.

The Committee was advised that the involvement of Derbyshire County Council as the Local Highway Authority would be crucial, particularly in respect of on-street parking issues, regulation and enforcement and accordingly, Amanda Watson, the Area Traffic and Safety Officer had been invited to attend the Meeting.

The Chair advised that the purpose of the Meeting was to define the scope of the study. There would be different issues regarding car parking for the urban core as opposed to the District's rural areas. Ideas on the levels of service were welcomed from Members of the Committee.

Councillor Hood referred to a problem with car parking at Etwall John Port School and Councillor Lemmon reported that this particular problem was escalated by 6th Formers parking at John Port School all day. Councillor Mead advised that she felt that there was a problem with parking at all schools in the District generally. Accordingly, the Chair suggested concentrating on the urban core initially, for this particular Review.

It was noted that this Council was responsible for car parks at Market Street, Hill Street, East End, Civic Offices and the Bus Park. Councillor Mead advised that particular problems were being experienced at the East End car park where the local taxi firm operating adjacent to the car park was occupying a number of spaces. A general discussion took place regarding the misuse of parking bays at the Council's car parks, particularly the Civic Offices car park where out of bay parking was a huge problem.

The Chair queried the level of criminal activity at the urban core car parks and was advised by E. Banton that this was not a problem generally. Any such criminal activity had tended to be located at the Market Street/Civic Offices/Poundstretcher car parks. The safety of car parks could be improved easily by the trimming of bushes and the installation of better lighting to improve security. E. Banton suggested that the Council could audit the car parks to determine what measures could be implemented to improve the general safety thereon. It was also suggested that the Council could obtain information from user surveys regarding the use of car parks and the number of spaces available within the urban core. The Deputy Chief Executive suggested that an up to date survey on both short term and long term car parking demands be undertaken. It was noted that current planning policy regulated for parking provision when new developments were designed but less spaces were now required to be provided due to the Government's emphasis on the use of public transport. It was agreed to undertake a survey on the usage of the Council's car parks and A. Watson agreed to investigate using Derbyshire County Council's survey numerators during their off-peak periods for this purpose. It was also agreed to look at an increase in the level of security at the Council's car parks.

The Chair advised that the Committee would need to meet again to set the scope of the study as this was such a wide ranging issue. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that the Council needed to know what the customers thought about the urban car parks and whether the car parks met their needs. A. Watson suggested that when undertaking the survey on usage, a questionnaire with a pre-paid envelope was handed to users of the car park in order to obtain customer views.

Councillor Martin advised that in his opinion there were various issues surrounding car park provision, namely access, vandalism, enforcement and the Council's current policy of no charging. He asked how the public would feel about paying for parking. The Chair advised that there might be levels of charging which could be introduced on an enforcement basis but the Council needed to establish what the appropriate levels would be. Councillor Martin requested that the surveys undertaken addressed the needs of the disabled and elderly.

A discussion took place regarding breaches of parking regulations on areas such as The Delph, Swadlincote which were occurring. Such breaches would be addressed as part of the refurbishment of the Swadlincote Town Centre. It was noted that many other districts charged for off-street parking. Erewash Borough Council employed six parking attendants and issued excess charge notices (no VAT). The Deputy Chief Executive agreed to write to other Councils in Derbyshire to establish their approaches to both on-street and off-street car parking.

A. Watson advised that on-street parking used to be dealt with by Traffic Regulations Orders enforced by Derbyshire Constabulary. However, in 1990 decriminalised parking was introduced and parking attendants could be employed to issue penalty charges. The Department of Transport would like to decriminalisation implemented on a district-by-district basis and districts could decriminalise the whole of their areas. The Department of Transport also wished to see on-street decriminalisation and off-street decriminalisation combined. In some parts of Derbyshire, agency agreements were in place whereby the relevant district undertook the enforcement role for Derbyshire County Council but any excess finance was reimbursed to Derbyshire County Council. 'ring-fenced' for transport issues. A. Watson was currently looking at the consequences for the County of Derbyshire. A recent Traffic Management Bill gave the Constabulary power to insist on decriminalisation but it was unlikely that this would happen. It could take an authority a year to research decriminalisation properly and then another year to introduce it. A key issue was that the Department of Transport saw it very much as a joining up of on-street and off-street parking enforcement and that there was a need to work together to set charge levels. A. Watson advised that it had been proven that the level of revenue always increased after decriminalisation of parking was introduced. However, this would be a huge review of on-street and off-street parking facilities. The set up costs for the whole of the County would be in the region of £1 million and it would take approximately two years to recoup that finance. Thereafter, the cost of parking attendants would be covered by the revenue generated from decriminalisation. A. Watson agreed to provide the Committee with documentation on decriminalisation in order that this matter be considered further. She advised that arising out of the Traffic Management Bill all districts in Derbyshire had now enquired about decriminalisation.

S. Wilson talked about the problem with enforcing the Swadlincote town centre area and advised the Committee that it was an offence to drive a vehicle through the town centre at any time even outside of the designated hours (except for access). He also stated that if the Council bought in charges before decriminalisation, the Constabulary would have a huge enforcement task for off-street parking offences. The Committee discussed the car parks within the urban core owned by private operators and emphasised the need to involve such operators in future discussions

regarding this. Accordingly, it was agreed to invite the private operators to the next meeting.

Councillor Martin expressed concern regarding on-street parking problems at Etwall, particularly Egginton Road and A. Watson talked about the need for schools such as John Port to devise travel plans to alleviate such problems. She advised however that particular problems such as the Egginton Road issue would be looked at by Derbyshire County Council if reported. S. Wilson advised that the local Crime Reduction Group at Etwall was meeting on 1st March 2004 and the issues reported regarding Etwall could be addressed then.

The Committee agreed to include parish councils and Areas Meetings in the consultation on the car parks.

Councillor Lane advised that he felt the parking issue surrounding parking at schools was a separate issue and that the Council needed to work and plan with schools. A. Watson agreed to speak to the Road Safety Scheme Officers regarding this particular matter. Councillor Lane asked that the Committee be appraised of the work undertaken by East Staffordshire Borough Council and North West Leicestershire District Council in order to assist with this Review. He also expressed concern regarding the on-street parking issues associated with the safety of the community. He felt that there were lots of places that emergency services vehicles would not be able to get access due to on-street parking and that accordingly, there was a need to provide a database of such locations in order to try to alleviate this problem. A. Watson advised that if emergency services were made aware of particular problem areas then they would go out and have a look at access in this regard. The Chair advised that he felt that the Council could reduce the charge for dropping kerbs in order to encourage residents to park off-road and thus alleviate on-street parking problems. The Deputy Chief Executive did advise that it was for the emergency services to satisfy themselves that they could get to a particular area.

In summary, the Committee noted that it had been agreed to undertake a survey on the usage of the urban core car parks using the County Council Survey Numerators, look at increased levels of security on the urban car parks, write to other Councils in Derbyshire to establish what action, if any they were undertaking with regard to their Councils and to invite private sector car parking operators in the town centre to attend the next meeting to take part in the review. Parish Councils and Area Meetings were also to be included in the consultation process for this Review.

CYS/43. **SCRUTINY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

The Audit Commission's report on 'A Healthy Outlook, Local Authority Overview and Scrutiny of Health' was circulated to Members for consideration at a future Meeting.

CYS/44. **WORK PROGRAMME**

A general discussion took place regarding the work programme for future meetings and it was agreed to circulate the programme to all Members of the Committee accordingly.

K. HARRINGTON

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 5.45 p.m.