

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**WEST MALLING LOCAL PARKING PLAN STEERING GROUP**

**7<sup>th</sup> November 2012 at 7pm**

**Report of the Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure**

**1 WEST MALLING LOCAL PARKING PLAN REVIEW**

**Summary**

**This report to the third meeting of the Steering Group analyses and assesses the response to the public consultation exercise carried out during March and April. It makes a series of recommendations based on the comments received from the local community.**

**1.1 The Review – Current Position**

- 1.1.1 The principal aim of the last meeting of the Steering Group in February was to agree the scope and content of the planned public consultation exercise. The guidance of the Group was incorporated in a consultation questionnaire (copy attached – **Annex 1**) and this was circulated to the 1280 registered addresses in the town during the consultation period from mid March to mid April. Some 300 further questionnaires were distributed, with the help of a number of local shops, to people visiting the town. This was supplemented by leafleting cars in the car parks.
- 1.1.2 The questionnaire was also circulated to West Malling Parish Council and the local Chamber of Commerce as well as Leybourne, Offham, Kingshill, Ryarsh and East Malling & Larkfield Parish Councils. Not all local councils responded, but the comments of those that did figure in this assessment of the public consultation exercise.
- 1.1.3 The consultation included specific proposals for additional on-street parking provision at Town Hill & Nevill Court, Water Lane and St Leonards Street. Properties in the immediate neighbourhood of each of these proposals received additional information and an invitation to express views on them.

**1.2 The Public Consultation Response**

- 1.2.1 Considering first the replies to the questionnaire, the overall response was as follows:
- Leaflets distributed in the town - 1280
  - Number of replies received – 141
  - 11% response

1.2.2 Note that there were an additional 15 replies from people living elsewhere generated by the questionnaires distributed through local shops and the windscreen leafleting exercise.

1.2.3 The questionnaire invited feedback on a number of questions and a summary of the response is as follows:

Question for people working, visiting or shopping in West Malling.	On-street space	Ryarsh Lane car park	High Street car park	Private car park
If you drive to West Malling, where do you normally park?	42	17	66	8
	31%	13%	50%	6%

General Questions	Serious shortfall	Slight shortfall	Adequate	Not a problem	Plentiful
What do you think about short stay parking provision in West Malling?	66	43	29	6	2
	45%	30%	20%	4%	1%

General Questions	Serious shortfall	Slight shortfall	Adequate	Not a problem	Plentiful
What do you think about long stay parking provision in West Malling?	67	36	12	12	1
	52%	29%	9%	9%	1%

Some nominal charging is essential in the High Street car park to help manage it and enforce it properly to keep it available for short stay fast turn-over parking. Do you support this?	Yes	No
	72%	24%

Do you support the package of parking proposals described in the consultation leaflet?	Yes	No
	52%	36%

What should be the maximum stay in the High Street car park?	2 hours	3 Hours	4 Hours
	5%	68%	24%

Note: balance of percentages is made up from those not expressing a view either way.

- 1.2.4 At a fundamental level, the rate of response to this consultation exercise challenges the assumption that the local community has serious concerns about the current scheme of parking management in West Malling. Every household and business in the town has had an opportunity to register their thoughts and wishes as far as parking is concerned. Therefore, the fact that only 11% have chosen to do so is a significant indicator of local feeling. Perhaps it reveals that residents and those working in the town recognise the practical difficulties in the delicate balances that a local scheme of parking management has to deal with and that the current arrangements provide a reasonable and realistic means of trying to achieve this.
- 1.2.5 Bearing in mind the calls from the Parish Council and the Chamber of Commerce for this review of the town's existing parking plan, it is worth focusing on one particular element of the response, the replies from local businesses. A central feature of the review has been the need to protect the short stay parking that is so essential to the economic vitality of the town. This requires a practical and workable means of managing and preventing long stay parking in the High Street car park.
- 1.2.6 Currently in order to identify those motorists who are in breach of the parking restrictions in the High Street car park it requires two CEOs to make three visits throughout a six hour period to gather the necessary evidence. The process requires the logging of each vehicles registration number and identifying the location where each car is parked so that the CEO can see if the vehicle has moved in between observations. Depending on the number of cars parked, each visit can take between 1 and 2 hours.
- 1.2.7 It is simply not an efficient use of the CEO's time to undertake this exercise on a regular basis. A recent weekday attempt to enforce to the restrictions in this car park resulted in a total of 4 PCNs being issued for the contravention of "exceeding the permitted stay". This operation required 8 man hours. However, if we were to require a "pay and display ticket" with a requirement to enter the vehicles registration number, enforcement would be concentrated on a single visit and this could take place throughout the day and not just in the afternoon as of now.
- 1.2.8 Of the 170 businesses that received the questionnaire, only 18 responded. Ten were in favour of introducing charging as a management tool in the short stay car park and eight were not.
- 1.2.9 This is a fairly mixed message from the business community but it contrasts with the overall response. The question about support for some nominal charging in the High Street car park to help manage it and enforce it properly to keep it available for short stay fast turn-over parking drew a yes response from 72% of those who replied and 24% not in favour. There is therefore some recognition

locally that better control of the short stay car park through the use of charging is desirable.

- 1.2.10 This is supported by some feedback from Tesco which shares the ownership of the public car park with the Borough Council. It too is concerned about the difficulties customers are experiencing in finding a space because they are being pushed out by long stay parkers. In these circumstances it appears minded to support nominal charging with a free first hour as a means of protecting the short stay stock. What this means is that, if the proposal eventually adopted includes introducing charges, then an agreement with the Borough Council's car park partner is likely to be achievable.
- 1.2.11 West Malling serves as a local centre for a reasonably sized catchment area surrounding the town. There is therefore a broader constituency beyond the town that has an interest in how the parking in the town is organised and managed. However, there are practical difficulties in capturing and factoring in the thoughts of each and every person who might at one time or another wish to park locally. Nevertheless, some information towards recording the views of visitors and shoppers has been obtained through leafleting of cars and distribution of questionnaires with the help of some of the local shops. It is important however to recognise that this particular group is also represented through the views of the Chamber of Commerce whose members will often depend on visitor footfall to support their businesses. Thus, the feedback from the Chamber serves as a valuable indicator. To this can be added the comments from neighbouring Parish Councils whose views have also been sought as part of the consultation exercise.

### **1.3 Surrounding Parish Councils**

- 1.3.1 No response has been received from West Malling Parish Council.
- 1.3.2 Offham Parish Council commented that the proposal for one hour free would be to the detriment of local businesses as shoppers would stay longer, and that the free period should be for two hours.
- 1.3.3 They also commented that the introduction of charges would deter visitors and the local area would suffer. It was also their view that the existing four hour restriction would be sufficient to prevent long stay parking.
- 1.3.4 Ryarsh Parish Council asked that the free period be extended to two hours in car park and on-street, as limiting this to one free hour would encourage people to shop elsewhere where there is free parking, such as Tesco or Asda.
- 1.3.5 They also did not believe that rail passengers would use the central parking areas as there were adequate facilities at the station and the existing town centre car park four hour limit discouraged rail users.

## **1.4 West Malling Chamber of Commerce**

- 1.4.1 As yet there has been no formal response from the Chamber of Commerce, but Mike McCulloch attended a meeting with the Chamber and reported wide-ranging views.
- 1.4.2 There was an over-estimation amongst members of the Chamber of what TMBC would be able to realistically consider in addressing the parking issues – building an extra car park, providing a deck to the Ryarsh Lane, provide number-plate recognition and enforcement in car parks, further ‘rationing’ of car park spaces.
- 1.4.3 A number of members were in opposition to the introduction of charges, whilst others were in favour if it would help discourage long-stay encroachment in to short-stay spaces.
- 1.4.4 However, after discussion, those whose original position was in opposition to charges were more inclined to support proposals if the first hour was given free.

## **1.5 Water Lane**

1.5.1 The proposals for Water Lane are in effect a formalising of the parking that already takes place so those consulted in the immediate area are not faced with any real change on the ground. What is significant in parking management terms is that the spaces are intended for use by people working in the town rather than what currently takes place. There is some observational evidence that spaces are being taken up by train commuters and by people going to the Country Park. Both of these have adequate, albeit paid for, parking so there is benefit in terms of parking management in the town in controlling these spaces for some of the overflow from the short stay car park if management measures are adopted to remove the long stay parking from the High Street car park. The response to the consultation was as follows:

- Number of forms/plans distributed – 44
- Number of replies - 8

1.5.2 Within this modest response no significant issues were raised and this element of the consultation can be readily recommended for approval. The important caveat is that it should be accompanied by an extension of the permit system to cover workers in the town to allow the spaces to contribute to the long stay capacity of West Malling.

## **1.6 St Leonards Street**

1.6.1 The additional information sent to premises in St Leonards Street sought views on proposals to create a series of formally marked lengths of additional parking. This would be needed to cater for overspill from the High Street car park if measures are introduced there to deal with the long stay car parking currently taking place. The additional 25 or so spaces that could potentially be created are consequently a critical part of the overall package of measures.

- Number of forms/plans distributed – 39
  - Number of replies - 16
- 1.6.2 Four of the replies supported the proposals. Eleven were not in favour. Most of those not in favour came from residents of Douces Manor and these were prompted by concerns about sight lines along St Leonards Street from the entrance to Douces Manor. It is not absolutely essential to provide all the lengths of parking outlined in the consultation plans and there is scope for adjustment of the detail to address the residents' concerns.
- 1.6.3 There is a further reason why parking should be seriously considered in St Leonards Street. Every so many weeks the High Street is closed while the Farmers' Market takes place. When this happens there is a substantial amount of parking in St Leonards Street. It is entirely unregulated and it creates considerable difficulties for both residents and those visiting the market. Formalising the parking would help bring a degree of order when people are using St Leonards Street as overspill parking for the town while the market takes place.
- 1.6.4 With the proviso about adjusting the proposal to meet the resident's concerns, the proposals for St Leonards Street are recommended for approval.

## **1.7 Town Hill & Nevill Court**

- 1.7.1 The final area where it was considered some additional on-street parking could be created to provide long stay capacity was in Town Hill.
- Number of forms/plans distributed – 71
  - Number of replies - 21
- 1.7.2 Three replies supported the proposals while 18 indicated that they did not. In parallel with the consultation response some residents also recorded their opposition in the form of a petition. It should also be recalled that members of the Steering Group themselves had some reservations about this element of the consultation. However, they recognised that the imbalance between the demand for long stay parking and the current capacity in the town made it essential that all opportunities should be examined. For this reason, it was included in the consultation so that the local community had an opportunity to express its views on it.
- 1.7.3 As it is, the responses received make it clear that any formal stage of statutory consultation on the proposal or even an adjusted one is likely to generate an overwhelmingly negative reaction from those in the immediate neighbourhood. For this reason, it is recommended that the Town Hill element of the package of measures be removed from further consideration.
- 1.7.4 The proposals for Nevill Court still had some merit, as there were already commuter / long-stay parking issues in the road. Some commented that they thought that Nevill Court was private. However, the road is adopted and there

were a number of comments from residents about long-stay parking and that residents should be given precedence.

1.7.5 The Nevill Court element of the proposals are recommended for approval.

## **1.8 Other areas**

1.8.1 The consultation produced comments that asked for consideration be given to other areas;

- The introduction of permit parking in Offham Road and Norman Road to address concerns about displacement parking.
- A re-assessment of parking arrangements within the School grounds and for parents picking-up and dropping off.
- There are ongoing concerns about a relatively recent problem relating to commuter parking on the A20 at the entrance to Leybourne Woods. This parking at this location has escalated following the resurfacing of the small parking area by KCC which seems to have triggered an awareness of the car park. Ideally Chalkwell, the commuter bus operator, would pick up its customers from a location where parked cars are not going to cause a problem. KCC has advertised a Traffic Regulation Order to promote waiting restrictions at this location to try and minimise the impact on the highway. Discussions are being held with their officers and Chalkwell to identify and potentially promote alternative suitable parking opportunities which would remove the nuisance of the commuter parking blocking the woods car park, the grass verges and footways.
- A little further along the A20 between 267 and 283 London Road we have had a request to consider extending the Residents' Preferential Parking (RPP) on the footway in front of these residential properties. The footway here is wide enough to cater for parked cars without obstructing passing pedestrians and is tolerated by KCC in recognition of this. Increasing pressure coming from commuters, new housing in the area, and use by Parkfoot garage customers is making it sometimes impossible for residents to use these spaces. I understand that the residents of these properties are keen to join the RPP scheme and are aware that they would all need to pay the annual fee. KCC has no objection in principle to the extension of the scheme to a pavement area

## **1.9 Conclusions**

1.9.1 Consultation exercises routinely draw comments and requests on many matters beyond the remit of the subject at hand. This consultation was no different with views received on matters such as highway maintenance, traffic management issues and other such items all of which are more properly the responsibility of the local highway authority to address. Replies have been sent to those submitting a response to the consultation, acknowledging the comments received.

- 1.9.2 The submissions received in response to the public consultation exercise will be available for the Steering Groups inspection at the next meeting.
- 1.9.3 Despite the fairly low rate of response, there are clear messages to take from the consultation. There is an appetite for more robust management of the parking arrangements in the High Street car park using proportionate charging to protect the short stay capacity and to discourage the long stay use that is currently taking place. In conjunction with this reinforced management, there is qualified support for introducing some additional long stay on-street capacity, controlled by worker permits, needed to deal with the displaced long stay parking. The qualification relates to some of the lengths of parking proposed in St Leonards Street and the removal from further consideration of additional parking in Town Hill.
- 1.9.4 Therefore there is support for an adjusted and modest package of measures outlined in the consultation questionnaires. Additionally the parking arrangements in Offham Road and Norman Road should be investigated further. This could be added to the Borough Council's holding list for subsequent review following any changes as a result of this review.
- 1.9.5 The Steering Group is invited to recommend accordingly to the next meeting of the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board and subsequently to the Joint Transportation Board.

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