

REPORT ON THE PROPOSED NEW PARKING STRATEGY FOR DEDHAM

Context

Colchester Borough Council (CBC) circulated a proposed new Parking Strategy for Dedham in May 2013 with the objective of implementing this before the commencement of the summer holiday season in July 2013. At a special Meeting of Dedham Parish Council (DPC) on 22nd July 2013 it became clear that there was considerable opposition to their proposals and that inadequate time was available either to evaluate the impact of the proposals or to discuss these properly with Dedham. As a result, the portfolio holder from CBC, Cllr. Martin Hunt, agreed to defer the implementation of the new arrangements until 1st April 2014 to give the Parish Council sufficient time to consult with stakeholders and groups within the village who might specifically be affected by the proposed changes; to consider the detailed provisions within the scheme and to enter into proper negotiation with DPC to enable it to reach agreement with CBC on a partnership basis.

Action Taken

Following from this DPC has undertaken the following:

- Established a Working Party of councillors to review, propose and undertake discussions with all interested parties on behalf of DPC, reporting back as appropriate.
- Conducted a survey of usage within the Mill Lane car parks on one weekday and one weekend in August 2013
- Circulated a questionnaire to all businesses within the High Street in November 2013, followed up by further discussions with each business as appropriate
- Consulted with other interested stakeholders and individuals as appropriate
- Formulated a set of strategic intents to inform the negotiations with CBC which were approved by DPC at its meeting on 10th February 2014 and published on the DPC website
- Held meetings and discussions with CBC on a range of issues culminating in the recommendations that are contained in the final Parking Strategy for Dedham which is attached to this report.
- Placed regular updates and correspondence relating to progress of the consultations on the DPC website

Negotiation Process

The Working Party was influenced throughout by the following principles and factors:

- Its strategic intents as agreed at its meeting on 10th February. It should be noted that it has never been a strategic intent of DPC to pursue agreement with CBC on this strategy as an income generating project.

- The fact that the freehold and maintenance of the two car parks in question were the responsibility of CBC
- That it had been proposed that DPC enter into a Partnership Agreement with CBC on the implementation and monitoring of the scheme
- The desire to get the best possible outcome for Dedham with CBC

Early in the negotiations it was made clear to us that there was one fundamental principle within our proposed strategy which CBC was unable to concede. This related to the harmonisation of the two hour free parking period between the High Street (currently 2 hours) and the main car parks in Mill Lane (which CBC had proposed should be limited to 1 hour). Since we were unwilling to concede the reduction of the free period in the High Street to 1 hour this meant seeking the extension of the Mill Lane free period to two hours. CBC's considered response to this was that this could not be accepted because it would not generate sufficient income to cover on-going maintenance costs. The further principle that was reported as non-negotiable was the start date for the new proposals of 1st April 2014.

However, on a range of other components of the proposed Scheme we have secured a number of valuable amendments. These are:

- A significant change of emphasis within the published strategy reflecting our concerns on a number of issues
- An agreed list of works which will be undertaken within the car park to improve the area
- Changes to the coach park arrangements and signage to permit cars legally to use the coach park at weekends and bank holidays
- Improvement in the number of parking permits for businesses: now 2 free permits and an unlimited number of permits at the current annual rate
- Maintenance of the existing parking arrangements in the High Street (2 hours free parking)
- A revised list of charges with specific provision for a new category of charge for parking for periods of up to 4 hours
- A joint review and monitoring process which will allow us to identify any critical pressure points and evaluate the progress of the strategy

Summary

Overall the Working Party is of the view that it has achieved a reasonable outcome for the village. Whilst we have not won concessions on all our desired points we have achieved significant change and believe we can now recommend the adoption of the attached Parking Strategy to both residents and councillors as being the best outcome achievable from the negotiations. We are therefore recommending that DPC formally enters into the Partnership Agreement proposed by CBC and the signing of the Partnership Agreement which ratifies this.

Whilst we do not anticipate achieving significant income from this scheme in its early years, we do acknowledge that there is potential for generating valuable income for use in the village in the medium term which given the low level of our current financial reserves would be a real asset.

Parking in Royal Square

Included in CBC's initial draft Parking Strategy for Dedham was a suggestion that DPC, which both owns and manages Royal Square, might wish to consider requesting CBC to include Royal Square in its managed parking arrangements. This would have involved both the installation of ticket machines and enforcement on the Square which is something DPC wishes to avoid if at all possible.

However, given the general pressure on parking within the High Street vicinity and some of the current longer term parking practices in Royal Square, particularly by business employees, we now wish to revert this back to short-term parking only for the benefit of both residents and businesses and align it with the arrangements in the High Street. We have therefore devised a new Royal Square Parking Strategy which encourages this principle. To support this we have made specific proposals to safeguard the parking arrangements for residents immediately surrounding the Square and provided greater flexibility in the business permit scheme which businesses can apply for on behalf of their employees.

A copy of the proposed Royal Square Strategy, which we are proposing be implemented alongside the new CBC strategy on 1st April 2014, is also attached and will similarly be recommended for approval by DPC at the March Meeting. As the strategy makes clear, we very much hope that members of the village and the general public will co-operate with what is essentially a voluntary policy. Parking here will be monitored closely throughout the year and if it is not successful we may have no alternative but to include this also in CBC's managed regime in the future. We hope this will not be necessary.

Cllrs. Sheila Beeton, Peter Gibbins, Tony Regan and Kevin Taylor
DPC Working Party Members
25th February 2014.