

Crawley Borough Council

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Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee 30 June 2014

Report to Cabinet 2 July 2014

Town Centre Car Parking Scrutiny Panel Final Report

Report by the Chair of the Town Centre Car Parking Scrutiny Panel: Councillor B K Blake
OSC/223

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The Town Centre Parking Car Scrutiny Panel was established in February 2014 to review the transport/travel and parking related issues within the Town Centre and four adjacent neighbourhood parades. This report presents the findings and recommendations.
- 1.2 The Panel met 4 times between March 2014 and May 2014. The Members of the Panel were:
Cllrs B K Blake (Chair), B J Burgess, R G Burgess, C A Moffat and P C Smith.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To the Overview and Scrutiny Commission:

The Commission is asked to note the report and to endorse the recommendations and actions, and amend any recommendations as appropriate, of the Town Centre Parking Scrutiny Panel and decide what comments, if any, it wishes to submit to the Cabinet.

- 2.2 To the Cabinet:

The Cabinet is recommended to approve the actions and recommendations set out in Section 7 to provide strategic planning and oversight of parking needs and delivery.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 3.1 Following the Panel's investigations, findings obtained showed there is currently a range of charging scales throughout the various car parks in the town centre. This does offer the customer choice, however the Panel also noted inconsistencies in terms of operation and signage.
- 3.2 Evidence identified that customers were unaware of the different options available. Additionally, improper use of parking in leisure facilities and parades was mainly caused by lack of sufficient car parks for commuter traffic.
- 3.3 Accessible parking areas (disabled/blue badge) were not always clearly identified and again lack consistency across the town's car parks.

4. Background - The Panel's investigations and information gathering

The initial scope of the review was to explore the range of parking opportunities currently available in the Town Centre and to explore the range of parking opportunities currently available (including the quantity and cost of parking) in adjacent neighbourhoods.

Its purpose was to ascertain if there was demand for and the potential to create additional parking sites, whilst also identifying if there could be improved or alternative travel options or travel incentive options for Crawley Residents or whether to provide specific recommendations that could attract new customers to the Town Centre and help retain or increase new businesses to the area.

Methods of investigation

4.1 Witnesses.

The following attended witness sessions, as the most appropriate stakeholder representatives that had been identified through the Scoping Framework:

Steve Kirby (Enforcement & Technical Services Manager)
Alfredo Mendes (Town Centre Manager)
Councillor Chris Cheshire, Chair of Town Access Group (TAG)
Damian Brewer (Access Officer)
Brian Puddephatt-Jones – NCP Ltd
Aaron Hinton - NCP Ltd
Karim Charnia - RCP Ltd
Mishal Francis - Poundland Ltd

4.2 Comparative costs between Parking Operators within Crawley

The Panel were able to compare parking costs of all parking operators across the Town Centre and in doing so found that Crawley Borough Council parking charges compared favourably with other parking operators in the Town.

4.3 Comparative Costs with other Local Authorities within West Sussex

The Panel were able to compare parking costs with other Local Authority facilities in West Sussex and in doing so found that Crawley Borough Council parking charges compared favourable with other Local Authority parking facilities.

4.4 Location, quantity and quality of Accessible Parking spaces

A very comprehensive survey of the Town Centre Accessible Parking provision was undertaken by Damian Brewer, Crawley Borough Council's Access Officer. The survey and report were presented to the Panel in April. The Panel were advised that prescribed Standards were not being met across the Town but some operators were working in partnership with the Town Access Group (TAG) to continually improve provision and standards of disabled parking spaces.

5. Findings

- 5.1 From evidence provided by Car Parking Providers within town centre (CBC, WSCC, NPC, County Mall and RPC.) there is no shortage of parking facilities at most times within the town centre. Data provided shows that outside of the seasonal peak, most car parks are averaging less than 70 % occupancy.

- 5.2 Car parks in the main were well situated around the periphery of the town shopping centre, with most located on or near the major distributor roads
- 5.3 Most parking is in 'off street' car parks with very little 'on street' parking. This was by 'design' with the original traffic management plan for the new town. On street parking was controlled by pay & display. Most 'off street' car parks also worked on a pay & display system meaning that it was easy to either over pay for a short stop or to underpay if delays are encountered. There is a range of charging scales around the various car parks in the town centre allowing people choice of best value for the time taken whether short (under one hour), medium term, or long term (4 hours and over to all day). Zoned Parking charges are higher the nearer you get to the Town Centre. The Council's car parks were competitively priced in comparison to neighbouring Towns. County Mall operates on a 'pay on exit' system, ensuring customers pay only for the time used.
- 5.4 Accessible car (Disabled / Blue badge) is predominantly 'on street' in the centre of town. There are also spaces for disabled in all 'off street' car parks but privately owned operator sites were not always to standard. Some town centre car parks had won awards for design and 'usability', The Council's car parks at both the Orchard Street and Exchange Road had both received the 'Safer Car Park' award.
- 5.5 The electronic display system highlighting empty car park spaces to drivers entering the town are showing their age and could be updated. Additional information could be displayed with either additional windows or on a time sharing basis to show number of Accessible spaces and availability. The signs could also display a fixed message on average cost per hour. Although both CBC & WSCC web sites have live information on car parks and space availability, these do not appear to be widely used.
- 5.6 Car park use appears to be based on the customers' previous experience and choice, as most were unaware of the available options and so would not necessarily get best value in parking time for their money

6. Description of Issues to be resolved

- 6.1 Representations from commercial concerns in town centre regarding indiscriminate parking of private vehicles in service courts and delivery areas and in some instances illegal parking on service roads cause extreme difficulty in deliveries to stores and blocking of employee vehicles.
- 6.2 Over use and improper use of parking facilities in parks, neighbourhood parades, leisure facilities and on street parking just outside of the controlled zones around the immediate town centre, by commuter traffic from early morning to early evening causes issues. This was mainly caused by lack of sufficient car parks for this segment of customer. Parks, playing field car parks and some neighbourhood parades were also being used for shopper parking, as it was free of charge and unlimited.
- 6.3 Accessible Parking areas were not all marked satisfactorily in most of the privately provided facilities; although both major operators were currently making strong efforts to bring them all up to required standards. It remains that many disabled drivers were not able to see where the marked spaces were located from the notice provided at the entrance and had to spend a lot of time and effort driving around the car park in order to locate these spaces.
- 6.4 Orchard Street car park had now entered a new phase trial by offering FREE overnight parking to accommodate the predominantly night time economy from the High Street.

7. Information, Analysis & Actions Supporting Recommendation

7.1 The Panel has proposed the following actions and recommendations –

7.2 All stakeholders form a Crawley Borough Council led Town Centre Parking Forum, established and directed by Planning and Environmental Services. This Forum will work together with private/commercial enterprises, the Town Centre Partnership, and others to provide strategic planning and oversight of parking needs and delivery. This new Forum would be best placed to monitor parking availability, signage, accessibility standardisation and marketing in readiness for the Town Centre shopper improvements envisaged for both the County Mall and Queens Square. Additionally, this Forum would be able to -

Marketing

- a) Increase public awareness throughout parking facilities within the town. Some car parks (Town Hall especially) should have more prominent marking/labelling
- b) Increase direction sign posting to major car parks. Increase prominence of active / live parking available pages on web sites.
- c) Consider the development of a Crawley Borough Council smart phone APP that would include details of town centre and neighbourhood car parks
- d) Consider occasional / seasonal 'wrap' feature to include a map/plan identifying parking availability in local press, to increase public awareness of parking offered in Crawley Town Centre highlighting variations in cost/hour for specific usage.
- e) Consider highlighting the location of spaces for the disabled. Erect large notice boards at the entrances to the car parks showing the floor (if applicable) and location(s) of accessible spaces. On each floor there should be a ceiling mounted sign to indicate location of each space.

Operational

- f) Investigate possible use of parking enforcement team in oversight of parking in the many service areas that are not part of highways area by providing a service contract between the Town Centre Partnership (on behalf of the many shops and commercial concerns) and the County and Borough Councils.
- g) Seek additional areas from current unused land for long term (6 hours or over) for commuter traffic. Only one car park at moment specifically targets this market segment. More of this parking type would decrease use of parking spaces in recreation areas. Encourage private land owners to consider this temporary use of their land.
- h) Consider ensuring that all parade car parks and recreational areas in the neighbourhoods with immediate access to the town centre (West Green, Northgate, Three Bridges & Southgate) have parking restrictions in place allowing parking up to a maximum of 2/3 hours with no return for 2/3 hours. Ideally this should be consistent throughout all neighbourhoods.
- i) Consider stopping access to playing field car parks before 9:00am to discourage commuter parking in these areas.
- j) Consider replacing current Council obsolete parking meters used in its own Car parks with modern, state of the art 'Pay on Exit' machines that will accept payment by cash (full change given), card or by mobile phone.

- k) Improve pedestrian access from the High Street through to Orchard Street to increase awareness and use of Orchard Street Car Park for both the day time and night time economies.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 The Panel recognised that there would be some financial implications for all Car Park Operators should the recommendations be approved. At the time of going to report, new 'Pay at Exit' barriers were being considered at the Town Hall Car Park as part of the ongoing Systems Thinking Review on Parking Improvements being led through the Enforcement and Technical Services Intervention.

9. Background Papers

Minutes of Town Centre Car Parking Scrutiny Panel Meetings February 2014 – May 2014

Panel Membership and Thanks

The Panel was made up of the following five Members: Councillors B K Blake (Chair), B J Burgess, R G Burgess, C A Moffat and P C Smith.

The Panel would like to thank all the witnesses and officers who gave up their time to attend the various Panel meetings, and for their valued comments, views and advice. Although this had been a concise and short scrutiny panel, it had attempted to address a practical problem in an inclusive and holistic way taking into account the views of all stakeholders.