

Appeals & Complaints Committee

A meeting of Appeals & Complaints Committee was held on Monday, 14th March, 2011.

Present: Cllr Robert Gibson (Chairman), Cllr Ian Dalgarno and Cllr Aidan Cockerill (vice Cllr Mrs Womphrey)

Officers: J. Butcher, M.Henderson (LD) W. Trewick, M. Chicken (DNS)

Also in attendance: Members of the public

Apologies: Cllr Andrew Sherris, Cllr John Fletcher, Cllr Mohammed Javed, Cllr Jean Kirby, Cllr Mrs Mary Womphrey

ACC 16/10 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations.

ACC 17/10 **Committee Procedure**

The Committee considered a proposed committee procedure.

RESOLVED that the procedure be agreed.

ACC 18/10 **Yarm Parking Proposals**

An officer from Technical Services presented a report that detailed proposals to introduce waiting restrictions on a number of streets in Yarm Town Centre together with the introduction of charges at Yarm rail halt and two off street car parks in central Yarm. The report also detailed unresolved objections received following the statutory advertising of the proposals.

The Committee noted that Stockton Borough Council had engaged with the residents, visitors and businesses of Yarm during June and July 2009 to seek opinion on how to move forward in resolving parking issues on Yarm High Street and the immediate vicinity. The objective of the exercise was to stimulate debate and capture ideas on suggestions to resolve Yarm's long standing parking problems.

Key messages from the results were summarised as: -

- There was widespread clear support for an additional long stay car parking facility needed in Yarm.
- The support for charging for short stay car parking in Yarm had a mixed reception, but in order to be able to deliver a 'new' long stay car park and a residents permit parking scheme, charging in the High Street would be necessary. It would also provide greater flexibility and clarity than the current Disc Zone regulations. However in the short term, there is no intention to introduce charging (on the High Street).
- The introduction of a residents' permit parking scheme had majority support, particularly from those within the Central Yarm area, whom were directly affected by on street commuter parking.

- The sites identified in the consultation showed that the land behind the Medical Centre (Brickyard Allotments) was the most favourable, of those listed. However, the Council was keen to pursue all options available, particularly other potential central Yarm sites.

- The consultation suggested that there was no desire to extend the current disc parking from 2 hours to 3 hours maximum.

Subsequently Council officers attended a public meeting in Yarm on 25 January 2010 and as a result the option for providing long stay parking on the Brickyard Allotments was accepted as not feasible and that other sites would continue to be investigated.

The meeting also heard from residents and traders that felt some measures could be brought forward quickly whilst the longer-term goal of providing additional car parking for Yarm was pursued.

These measures were essentially:

- to introduce Traffic Regulation Orders to help control the worst examples of obstructive parking in the Wynds and streets behind the High Street,
- to introduce some flexible medium term parking (for longer than the 2 hour stay available in the Disc Zone).

In the light of the above, officers prepared proposals to introduce waiting restrictions in a number of streets in Yarm Town Centre and charges in two off street car parks in central Yarm. These, together with proposals to introduce charges at Yarm rail halt were advertised on 6 January 2011. Following the publication of the Statutory Notices 296 individual objections were received and 8 petitions containing 1131 names. It was explained that Cllr Sherris, one of the ward councillors, had also objected to the proposals.

Members were provided with breakdowns of the objections, based on location and theme.

The main objection themes included:

Yarm Rail Halt

- counterproductive to encouraging sustainable travel modes.
- displaced parking in surrounding streets.
- congestion at the ticket machine just before scheduled train departures.

Yarm Town Centre

- 35% reduction in spaces. Harder to park. Object to restrictions. Need a long stay car park.

- Fees too High. Should be kept free.
- Adverse effect on residents, customers, visitors and shop workers.
- Adverse effect on shops and businesses and detrimental to Yarm.
- Specific objections from residents living in central Yarm wanting fewer restrictions and/or residents permits.
- Specific objections from residents living in central Yarm wanting greater restrictions to prevent displaced parking.
- Concerns over general displacement.

Members were provided with officer's responses to the objections received.

Yarm Rail Halt

It was pointed out that current running costs were met from Stockton Town Centre car parks income. The proposed £1 daily charge was still significantly lower than Stockton Town Centre charges (£2.40 per day) and those at other rail station car parks at Darlington and Thornaby, to reflect the Council's desire not to cause significant displacement. Rail users would still have a convenient and secure car park for a relatively modest price. Any future extension of the car park would require funding from the car park income stream.

It was possible that the imposition of charges would deter some non-rail users, creating spare capacity.

It was noted that passengers would never need to risk missing a train or incur a penalty charge (if parking charges were approved) as all Council charging car parks were covered by the RingGo scheme whereby you can pay for parking by mobile phone whilst you are actually away from your vehicle (on the train) without the need to display a ticket.

Season tickets would be available reducing costs for regular users.

Yarm Town Centre

It was explained that contrary to the basis of some of the objections there was no intention to "remove 35% or 170 parking spaces". Neither did the proposals include any changes to parking on Yarm High Street, which would continue to provide parking for 333 cars (206 in the Disc zone and 127 in the long stay area).

Members were provided with details of the practical impact the waiting restrictions would have on each street affected by the proposals. The presenting officer made reference to a possible revision to the proposed waiting restrictions on the Old Market. If the advertised Old Market proposals did not proceed then there would be less than 10 spaces lost across the town centre.

Objectors had raised concerns relating to the potential displacement of vehicles caused by the restrictions. It was explained that this situation would be

monitored if the proposals were introduced.

Members noted that in 2009 and 2010, Stockton's Neighbourhood Enforcement Officers were called to four of the streets covered in the proposed parking restrictions Order on 400 occasions resulting in 750 actions, mainly the issue of removal notices.

The proposals were to introduce Pay and Display parking charges on the two small public off- street car parks in Yarm where workers and students took up most of the spaces for the whole day. The locations were at Castle Dyke Wynd (23 spaces) and Old Market (16 spaces) and the proposed hours of operation were 8am to 6pm, Monday to Saturday with charges of £1 for the first two hours and £1 per hour thereafter.

During the public consultation in 2009, a recurring theme from the Yarm Chamber of Trade, its members and Yarm Town Council was for longer permitted parking than the Disc Zone allowed in order to provide somewhere shoppers could be directed to if they wanted to park a little longer than the 2 hour Disc zone limit. Placing the needs of customers/visitors above the convenience of workers and students was seen as priority to improve the trading position of Yarm. The Chamber of Trade endorsed this priority in several discussions with them.

The suggestion of amending the Disc zone regulations to 3 or 4 hours and reducing the hours that it operated were looked at but it was considered that the potential loss of parking opportunity, due to longer stays, would be counter-productive to the needs of Yarm as it would simply encourage more all day parking in the Disc zone (by moving the car just once per day).

An option to change part of the Disc zone to a longer period was also considered but this was considered impractical in terms of enforcement and the additional street clutter of regulatory signs. Instead the proposal was to change two small off-street car parks from all day free parking to pay and display that would give the opportunity for those shoppers and business visitors to obtain a parking space for longer than 2 hours (albeit for a small charge).

A number of objectors (approximately 57) stated that the parking fees were too high and that it would cost shop workers £8 - £9 per day to continue to park at these locations. The Council did not intend that workers paid to park all day but rather that the car parking spaces were reserved for customers and visitors.

The Council had spent several years exploring the opportunity to provide a large long stay car park for Yarm culminating in the 2009 consultation exercise that suggested the most likely site was the Brickyard allotments. During the feedback on the consultation, it was accepted that the Brickyard allotments site would not proceed but that action still needed to be taken to provide some additional long stay parking on smaller sites and some medium stay flexible parking (2-4 hours). It is considered that the proposals as amended can come forward independently since the net impact on overall parking supply is minimal.

It was explained that officers would continue to work with private landowners to release vacant or underused land for additional long stay parking. However, given that the quantity of parking overall in Yarm was expected to change very

little as a result of the proposals, the net effect was that shop workers and students currently taking convenient parking spaces early on a morning would be displaced and shoppers and visitors needing longer than 2 hours parking would know where to find medium stay car parking facilities.

At this point objectors to the proposals were given the opportunity of making representations to the committee. The following points/comments were made:

- High Church Wynd - proposals would leave only 4 places for 30 dwellings.
- suggested that High Church Wynd be made residents' access only.
- concerns were expressed over the effect restrictions would have on residents' parking - general displacement of vehicles from other areas.
- West End Gardens would be used as a dumping ground for displaced vehicles, access for emergency vehicles would deteriorate.
- the proposals would wipe away 39 parking spaces in Yarm.
- a consultation document, published by the Council, had not suggested the option of increasing the disc parking from 2 to 3 hours and was therefore flawed.
- Yarm Chamber of Trade had undertaken a survey, which had suggested a preference for parking on the High Street to be increased from 2 to 3 hours.
- businesses and residents/shoppers needed 3 hours in the parking zone.
- the proposals were revenue driven.
- the Council should be encouraging people into the town but proposals would drive people away from the town, by charging.
- there was a need to establish a long stay car park before any restrictions or other proposals were introduced.
- Park and ride should be considered - Tall Trees was suggested.
- retailers were suffering and the proposals would make things worse - staff redundancies may be necessary.
- Traffic Enforcement Officers were too heavy handed.
- local Councillors, Yarm Town Council and the community were not in favour of the proposals.
- displaced parking would go to Butt Lane, Eaglescliffe.
- High Church Wynd - proposals would cut available parking by 50%.
- as a result of the proposals, in the region of 50 vehicles would be displaced.

- reducing parking by a single place was one too many and would negatively affect the Town.

- students may be able to park at the school when the development was finalised.

The officer responded to some of the issues raised:

- Proposals would have no impact on Bentley Wynd or Bridge Street.

- High Church Wynd - 2/4 places would be lost. The road was a public highway and entry could not be restricted.

- the consultation document referred to by objectors was to open up discussion and receive suggestions. There was little support for 3 hour parking.

- the public meeting in January 2010 highlighted residents and traders desire to have some parking, available to shoppers, for longer than 2 hours. The Yarm Chamber of Trade had endorsed this as a priority.

- increasing the permitted hours in the disc zone would encourage all day parking by workers, at the expense of shoppers. The proposals accepted the idea that preference should go to shoppers rather than workers.

- the average duration of stay in the disc zone was less than 2 hours i.e. the vast majority of shoppers needed less than the 2 hours currently available to them.

- objectors could not reliably assert that the community was against the proposals as a majority of people had not objected.

- the Council was not revenue raising - all income from car parking was ring fenced and had to be spent on car parking.

- displaced parking would be monitored over a 6 month period.

- the Council understood that no student parking would be made available at the school.

- there appeared to be limited potential long stay car park sites in Yarm but officers would continue to try and identify possible sites and work with owners.

The Chairman then allowed objectors to provide brief final statements and:-

- asked the committee to uphold their objections.

- explained that they felt the consultation document had been flawed and any proposals arising from it had, therefore, also been flawed.

- reiterated the need for a long stay car park before any other proposals were introduced. Objectors considered that suitable sites did exist and would identify them.

- suggested that the disc zone be extended to 3 hours, possibly for a trial period.

- considered that if there was a willingness to find a site for long-term parking then any obstacles to it would be overcome.

- considered there was no easy solution but the proposals exacerbate existing problems by displacing vehicles.

At this point the committee retired to another room to consider the information it had received.

The committee noted the concerns of objectors about the proposals and the effect they claimed they would have on the town centre. The committee also noted objectors' assertions that potential long stay car parking sites were available in Yarm. The committee agreed that, in view of these assertions and the concerns voiced about the proposals, it would recommend that the committee's consideration be deferred for a 6 month period. During those 6 months the committee expected that discussions between officers and interested parties, such as Yarm Town Council and Yarm retailers, would take place to identify available sites for long stay car parking. The committee would meet again in 6 months should officers wish to proceed with the proposals.

RESOLVED that the committee defer its recommendation for 6 months.