

BOROUGH WIDE CAR PARKING STRATEGY

CABINET DECISION 8 DECEMBER 2011

Proposals accepted in relation to Yarm High Street

Submission by Councillor Houchen, Councillor Sherris and Councillor Chatburn

Summary

1. Stockton Borough Council (SBC) **failed to adequately consult** with local borough councillors and Yarm Town Council (YTC).
2. Consultation on the July Strategy, which was to be informed by independent research (NEMS), ended before the NEMS research (see Appendix 1 & 2) was concluded. Consultation had closed almost 8 weeks before the results were shown to YTC, which meant that YTC could not make any representations on the Strategy.
3. In the July Strategy, it is stated that future consultation and market research would be carried out; however, to date, only the market research has been carried out. The updated November Strategy relies on old consultation, which was agreed would not inform this current process.
4. No additional spaces will be created through this proposal; indeed, this proposal will reduce long stay parking by up to 100 spaces. This is exactly opposite to the main recommendation from the NEMS research.
5. **The recommendation to extend the short stay parking zone would remove the capacity for long stay visitors, which include workers but most importantly residents, and displace those using these long stay places to adjacent residential streets further into Yarm and Eaglescliffe.** This has been a regular comment in officers reports as being a risk in Billingham and Thornaby but has been overlooked in Yarm. Additionally, this is in contradiction to the findings of the Report, which recommends the creation of an additional 80 – 120 long stay spaces to alleviate the current problem.

6. It is further recognised that the proposed provision for residents, by introducing 10 places for those residents with parking permits on a Saturday only, as determined in the September consultation document, is totally unacceptable and, again, conflicts with the findings of the independent research. Indeed, the proposal to increase short stay should be reversed given SBC state that the implementation of a Residents Permit Parking Scheme in Yarm, in the streets to the rear of the High Street, should therefore not be supported in the absence of an alternative long stay car parking facility.
7. **The impact on residents has not been fully investigated** or appreciated by officers and the proposals in the report do not provide any assurance to the occupiers of domestic properties that their needs have been identified or protected. There has been very little, if any, consultation with the residents of Yarm.
8. The conclusion of the borough wide review purports to address the issue of the provision of medium stay parking. **In NEMS and in the Report there is no mention of a need for medium stay provision.** SBC are, therefore, addressing the wrong issue.
9. Independent research states that to solve the current issues surrounding Yarm's parking provision any recommendations should focus on either:
 - a. Reducing the number of spaces workers use in the High Street (almost exclusively the long stay spaces outside of the actual High Street); and/or
 - b. **Find an 'out of centre' parking solution to alleviate pressure from those who wish to stay longer than 2 hours** – the Report suggests to alleviate the problem 80 – 120 spaces need to be identified.
10. There is no inferred or expressed recommendation from the Report, or the data, which suggests Pay & Display would help meet the needs of Yarm.
11. **The proposal, confirmed by Cabinet on 8 December 2011, conflicts with national guidance.**
12. **Given that officers are in on-going negotiations with local land owners and Rail Track to find a long stay car parking solution within Yarm I would ask the Executive Scrutiny Committee to refer the matter back to Cabinet to overturn their decision and postpone any decision on parking policy in Yarm until these negotiations are complete.**

NEMS Research

1. Parking and traffic issues in Yarm have been an on-going problem for many years and with an increasing population, compounded by potential housing development in the local area, the solution to the difficulties of parking provision must have the support of the business community and residents if we are to ensure the economic wellbeing of the High Street and its businesses in the future.

2. Yarm is rather unique in that it is not only a busy Town Centre and residential area but a thriving commercial centre and cultural hub offering entertainment and leisure opportunities, as well as being an attractive tourist destination. It is therefore necessary to ensure that any action on the part of the Council does not jeopardise the very fine balance that creates the current successful formula.
3. The proposed off street parking charges received strong objection from local residents, traders and Yarm Town Council. Subsequently the matter was referred to Appeals & Complaints Committee, in March 2011. The Committee agreed that, in view of the assertions and concerns voiced about the proposals, it would recommend their decision be deferred for 6 months.
4. During those 6 months the Committee expected that discussions between Council Officers and interested parties, such as Yarm Town Council and Yarm retailers would take place to identify available sites for long stay parking. SBC suggest that to date no suitable site has been agreed. **This is not true as a significant site has been identified at Yarm Backlands and on-going negotiations are taking place between SBC and local land owners. It would be premature to implement any scheme prior to the completion of these negotiations.**
5. To avoid making any uninformed decisions, SBC informed YTC at a meeting, dated 30 August 2011, that they would be commissioning NEMS to discover what the overall situation was in Yarm.
6. On this point it is my assertion that the basis on which officers made their recommendation to Cabinet was flawed. In the Report, the issuing of penalty notices in Yarm High Street is mentioned once. **The report in no way states or infers that the current disc zone is a problem when it comes to parking in Yarm High Street.** There is no evidence that Pay & Display would benefit Yarm and there is little or **no comment made by NEMS** on such a point. It should, therefore, be inferred that **the independent research does not see Pay & Display as a viable solution.** Indeed, recommendations are made by NEMS, however, at no point do they involve parking charges.
7. Indeed, NEMS shows throughout its report that the issue in Yarm High Street is the availability of spaces.
8. Some main points which came out of NEMS is as follows:
 - a. The only negative aspect to Yarm High Street was parking provision. This can be further narrowed to the availability of spaces. Figure 3 of the NEMS report shows that 61% of those surveyed said availability of spaces was an issue. This rose to 78% if you included traffic congestion as a result of poor parking provision.

- b. The average length of stay by a visitor is approximately an hour and a half thus indicating that turnover of spaces is not the primary issue.
- c. **80% of the time visitors get parked in their preferred location.**
- d. **96% of visitors get parked.**
- e. Additional figures in the Report show that more than 50% of those surveyed said availability of spaces was quite/very poor.
- f. 50% of spaces in Yarm are taken up by workers; however, the vast majority of the taken spaces are long stay and fall outside the disc zone.
- g. While availability of spaces was considered poor, point 14 of the NEMS Report shows that **81% of visitors found it quite or very easy to find a space.**
- h. **Only 30% of all spaces in Yarm are restricted** (i.e. disc zone).
- i. 29% of people have issues with parking availability and not the working or management of the parking provisions in Yarm.
- j. Additionally, from the 700 spaces in Yarm, 60% of all visitors used 206 spaces (being the restricted 2 hour disc parking). This means that **on a daily basis 206 spaces are used by, on average, 1800 people.**
- k. Approximately 300 - 350 of the 700 spaces in Yarm directly affect residents as their only means of parking near their property. Evidence of this is included in the survey.
- l. It is inferred in the Report that the **4% who have trouble finding a space want to stay longer than two hours; however, they are largely unable to due to staff in the High Street taking most of the long stay provision.**
- m. The Report concludes that most visitors are limited to the restricted 2 hour spaces on the High Street as long stay spaces are taken by workers.
- n. The Report also concludes that to solve the current parking provision issue **there is a need to find approximately 100 additional long stay spaces. The Report suggested that 'out of centre' parking provision is likely to be the answer.**
- o. Figure 6 of the Report shows clearly that availability of spaces is the issue. Given that 206 spaces accommodate, on average, 1800 cars a day it is clear that any additional need is long stay.

- p. The Report also states that the plateau in Figures 22 & 23 is not because the High Street is full but because **the restricted zone is working at maximum turnover capacity with pressure on long stay availability.**
 - q. **Only 150 of the 10,000 (approx.) residents of Yarm were consulted during this study.**
 - r. The Environment Select Committee Report to Cabinet in December 2010 suggested that it is inequitable not to charge in 3 town centres within the Borough when parking charges are applicable to Stockton town centre. It is suggested that this is the real reason for Pay & Display given that all evidence is to the contrary. SBC should be looking at the removal of parking charges in Stockton.
 - s. The Consultation carried out in 2009, in respect of Yarm High Street, was flawed. Local Representatives were personally informed that the reason for engaging NEMS was to 'start with a clean slate' and so the 2009 consultation should not be taken into account.
9. The introduction of the "Disc Parking Scheme" some years ago was very successful in ensuring that visitors and shoppers had the opportunity to find a parking place close to the shops in the High Street and these businesses have flourished with Yarm being identified as a very successful Town Centre, contrary to the performance of many others. This is evidenced by the fact that the NEMS Report shows that the 206 disc zone accommodates, on average, 1800 per day.
10. **It is also evidenced, from the recent NEMS research, that there is a need for additional long stay parking of between 80 – 120 spaces (point 19 of the Report).** It would appear from the research that the vast majority of these spaces should be long stay and not restricted, as in the disc zone. The reason for this is to alleviate the pressure on long stay spaces caused by workers in the High Street who occupy most long stay spaces throughout the day.
11. SBC state that extending the short stay Disc Zone to cover the entire length of cobbled area of the High Street would make available the 80-100 bays and encourage the regular turnover of parking spaces; **however, the issue in Yarm is not turnover but number of spaces and reducing availability by a further 80 – 100 spaces would further displace visitors to the surrounding streets of Yarm and Eaglescliffe.** Alternatively, it would put off visitors as the parking situation would be worse. This is evidenced in the NEMS research.
12. **SBC freely admit extending the Disc Zone would also reduce the number of long stay bays on the High Street for commuters.**

CONSULTATION

13. The consultation on the "Borough Wide Car Parking Strategy" was conducted electronically, by e-mail sent on 9 September 2011, to all elected Ward Members and Town/Parish Councils with the date for responses to be returned set at 30 September 2011. This was unworkable and premature as it was agreed at YTC, with agreement from SBC, that NEMS would be engaged to set a 'baseline' so that both SBC and YTC had a starting point to inform consultation. It was minuted in the meeting on 30 August 2011, that this new consultation process would override previous consultation. Therefore, this document should not have been produced before the result of the NEMS research, allowing a reasonable time period for YTC and other interested parties to feed back.
14. It was unworkable to request YTC make representations on the Strategy when they hadn't had sight of the NEMS research, which was to inform any consultation carried out.
15. The timing of this is important:
 - a. SBC went out to 'consultation' in September 2011 asking for responses by 30 September 2011.
 - b. The market research was not concluded until October 2011 with the results not being communicated to YTC until 25 November 2011. **No consultation took place as this was merely an informative meeting.**
 - c. By this time the updated November Strategy had already been compiled which meant that YTC could not make any representations to SBC in respect of the document as this opportunity was not afforded to them.
 - d. This then contradicts SBC's assertion that this was a joint venture between SBC and YTC.
16. **It should further be noted that borough councillors were given a presentation of the results prior to YTC; however, officers would not release the data from the NEMS research until it had been communicated to YTC. This meant that borough councillors had no information on which to make representations to SBC on the strategy.**
17. Additionally, when the July Strategy was released, it stated at paragraph 5.6 (Page 22):
 - a. *"A **future** consultation exercise on proposals outlined in this report would also be subject to a similar, comprehensive public consultation exercise and may include the use of formal market research."*
18. Additionally, recommendations of the July Strategy state, at paragraph 5.26 (page 26):
 - a. *"Y1 **Carry out a comprehensive consultation and market research** exercise to determine the best mix of car parking that will support the Yarm economic position."*

19. However, in the updated Strategy, released in November 2011, it was recommended at paragraph 5.31 (page 27):
20. Y1 **The results of the comprehensive consultation and market research exercise** are used to determine the best mix of car parking management strategy that will support the economic position of Yarm.
21. This is a change from the recommendation in the July 2011 Strategy and reads as though a comprehensive consultation has taken place when in fact the consultation exercise took place in 2009. The report in July 2011 talks of "...future consultation" and that they would "Carry out a comprehensive consultation and market research exercise".
22. To comment on the above, so far only the market research has been undertaken. No comprehensive consultation has taken place and from the language used, in both reports, it cannot be stated that both the consultation and the market research are one and the same. The NEMS research cannot be deemed consultation. Indeed, the report suggests that the research and consultation are two distinct entities.
23. Additionally, the language "future" and "carry out" indicate that the agreed course of action would be future consultation. It is, therefore, evidence that consultation has not taken place as the only consultation document referred to in the November 2011 Strategy is a consultation exercise which took place in 2009. It is all the more unsatisfactory as this consultation document has been widely discredited. This also contradicts officers' statements to YTC at the meeting dated 30 August 2011, in that this process would override previous consultation and processes (see Appendix 3).
24. It was decided at the meeting, on 30 August 2011, that SBC would return to YTC following the results of the research so that a consultation document may be drawn up to disseminate to residents. This did not happen.
25. Additionally, the economic climate was completely different in 2009 compared to 2011 and it is suggested that a new consultation exercise, as agreed, would produce differing views.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

26. Furthermore, in December, the recent "Mary Portas" report on reviving town centres recommends free regulated parking in town centres. Therefore, not only does the proposal conflict with the commissioned research but it flies in the face of national guidance.

27. It should also be noted that the officers report also identifies that reducing the times for charging in Stockton Town Centre would prove beneficial for increasing visitor and shopping activity.
28. On this point it should also be noted that Labour Cabinet Member, Councillor Mike Smith, was recently quoted in the press, saying: *“Car parking is an additional cost ...and we hope the free parking offer will help our residents save a little bit extra so they have more to spend on their friends and family. We hope the offer of free parking will encourage more people to shop in Stockton...”*

As the officers reports clearly identify that there are on-going negotiations with local land owners and Rail Track to find a long stay car parking solution within Yarm we would ask the Executive Scrutiny Committee to refer the matter back to Cabinet requesting that they reconsider their decision and postpone any changes in parking policy in Yarm until these negotiations are complete and a satisfactory consultation process has been completed.

In light of the “Portas” report we would also suggest that the charging policy for all Town Centres be subject to further consideration.

BEN HOUCHEN

Borough Councillor for Yarm & Kirklevington

Yarm Town Councillor

Appendix 1

NEMS Results

Appendix 2

NEMS Report

Appendix 3

Minutes of the Yarm Town Council Meeting with Stockton Council dated 30 August 2011

**NOTES OF A MEETING WITH STOCKTON BOROUGH COUNCIL ON CAR PARKING IN
YARM**

YARM TOWN HALL

6:30 PM.

30TH AUGUST 2011

PRESENT

Chairman: Councillor Hadlow

Councillors: Cllrs: Chatburn, Hornby, Monck, Neil, Mrs. Simpson, and Wegg.

Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer: Mrs. M Milburn

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs: Johnson, and Sherris.

STOCKTON BOROUGH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES:

Mike Chicken Built and Natural Environment Manager

Richard McGuckin Head of Technical Services

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

No apologies were received.

CODE OF CONDUCT – DECLARATION OF INTERESTS.

No declarations of interests were declared.

PROGRESS TO DATE

Richard McGuckin showed the Councillors a map of the back lands of Yarm and discussed the possibilities of parking within this area. He further confirmed that Stockton BC had held discussions with Network Rail and local land owners and that a feasibility study was now underway. Cllr Monck produced a map regarding access via High Church Wynd. This map was not considered relevant to the new proposals.

CONSULTATION/MARKET RESEARCH

Mike Chicken informed the Councillors that following a selection process NEMs Market Researcher's were appointed to carryout independent market research which will include 300 face-to-face and 650 telephone questionnaires. Telephone questionnaires will be divided into zones of 130 people in each zone throughout the borough. This will capture sufficient information to assess people's needs. In addition to this there will also be 15 questionnaires aimed at local businesses and 5 questionnaires to taxi proprietors. Overall 1,000 people will be interviewed.

Issues such as how the questionnaires will be targeted, demographics, times and ownership of the information was discussed. The questionnaire will also identify the general needs of the public in Yarm. As ownership of the information will belong to Stockton BC information will be readily available for analysis to identify varying factors. It was agreed that the business element of the questionnaire should be focused at local businesses and should exclude national establishments.

Any comments relating to the questionnaire methodology, content of the consultation or market research should reach Mike Chicken by no later than close of business on Friday 2nd September. Analysis is hoped to be completed by the 26th September 2011 and a draft report should be available by the 6th October 2010. Proposals will then go before the cabinet meeting of Stockton BC for discussion as part of a Borough wide strategy.

..... (Chairman)

Councillor Hornby queried how this fits in with the appeals committee deferred date. Mr Chicken informed the Council that the new consultation had superseded the appeals committee meeting.

A query was raised regarding the need for additional parking and the link with the SHLAA. There was considered to be a link but this will be dependent upon housing applications and planning requests.

Further discussions took place regarding effects of a long stay car park on the High Street, displacement of traffic and traffic congestion and compulsory purchase of land.

Councillor Hornby left the meeting at 7.25pm.

Mr McGukin informed Councillors that the cobbles surrounding the Town Hall will begin in the next financial year and Councillors will be presented with visual examples and materials for the suggested work. This item was for information purposes only.

TO RECEIVE ITEMS FOR INFORMATION AND CONSIDERATION FOR THE NEXT AGENDA

It was agreed that a meeting be held early October to discuss the results of the analysis.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 7.32 p.m.

Signed on behalf of Yarm Town Council

..... (Chairman)