

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the **Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 5 December 2018 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor J.Reid
(Chairman, in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

Armstrong, E.
Cartie, E.
Dunbar, C.
Dunn, E.

Gallacher, B.
Gibson, R.
Pattison, W.
Swithenbank, I.C.F.

CABINET MEMBER

Sanderson, H.G.H.

Environment and Local Services

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

P. Johnston
P. Jones
S. Nicholson

Interim Executive Director of Place
Service Director - Local Services
Scrutiny Co-ordinator

1 Press

39. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor J. Beynon.

40. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Communities and Place OSC held on 31 October 2018, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

41. CABINET REPORTS PREVIOUSLY CONSIDERED BY THE COMMITTEE

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator advised members of Cabinet decisions regarding issues previously commented on and been subject of report by this Committee. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix B).

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

42. SCRUTINY OF CABINET REPORTS

Improvements and Investment in Parking Provision

This report was considered by the Cabinet on 13 November 2018, which provided an update on the progress being made against the parking Action Plans that had been agreed for each of the 4 main market towns of Hexham, Berwick, Alnwick and Morpeth, and on progress with other works to improve parking provision across the County.

It also detailed the proposed means by which the Council would fund its investment in car parks, including through a combination of increasing existing charges and introducing new charges at a number of tourism and railway station car parks.

The report also sought approval to the list of car parks, proposed tariffs, consultation arrangements and outlined the process and timetable for implementation should the proposal be approved by Full Council when setting the MTFP in February 2019. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix B and the extract from the Cabinet minutes of 13 November 2018 are enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix C).

The report was presented to the Committee by Councillor Glen Sanderson, Cabinet Member for Environment and Local Services, supported by Paul Jones, Service Director - Local Services. He emphasised the need to improve car parks across the county, but that this should be realised without borrowing money, reducing services elsewhere or accessing funds from the Council's reserves. Funding would therefore have to be raised through parking charges.

The Committee were requested to comment on the report, which would be considered as part of the consultation on the proposals. The Chairman then referred to the update on the implementation of Parking Action Plans in the report and requested that the Committee be advised of changes town by town.

(1) Alnwick

Councillor Sanderson reported that it was apparent from discussions with the Town Council and local businesses, that there was a need for more short stay parking in Alnwick. He announced that land had been identified on the site of the old Duchess High School for both short and long stay parking, and it was anticipated that it could be used as an informal facility before Christmas. The Committee welcomed this proposal.

(2) Berwick

The Committee welcomed the proposals for Berwick as set out in the report, and noted that permanent solutions were being sort where there were currently temporary arrangements.

(3) Hexham

The Committee noted that the capacity of the Wentworth car park had reduced significantly since it was opened and that additional provision was needed.

(4) Morpeth

The Committee were advised that discussions were ongoing regarding traffic management issues around the railway station. Members noted that the land value of the Goosehill School site would be high, but agreed that a car park would be a good option for the town.

The Committee then considered updates on other parking improvement activity. The following areas were subject to comment:

(5) Blyth

Councillor Sanderson referred to the recent media coverage regarding the proposals for Blyth and reiterated that this process was a consultation and any comments or suggestions would be noted and evaluated accordingly. He reported that the car parks at South Beach (Beachway, Mermaid and the Ranch) were gateway destinations to Blyth and were in need of improvements. It was anticipated that around £60,000 would be allocated to upgrading the play area at the Mermaid car park and further funding could be set aside for improving the footpath between Blyth and Seaton Sluice. He reported that discussions were ongoing with various user groups to determine whether their needs could be accommodated in the final plans.

Councillor Cartie advised the Committee that as her Ward was in Blyth, she had been approached by many residents voicing their concerns regarding the proposals and was aware that a petition against them was being organised. Many were from low income households who could not afford parking charges to enjoy community facilities that were previously free to access. This was unfair to local people. She reported that dog walkers and cafe patrons needed more than one free hour, which she felt would be costly to manage and enforce anyway. She forecasted that many users would eschew the car parks in favour of parking in surrounding residential streets, thereby casting doubt as to whether enough funds would be raised for the proposed improvements. The Council should examine other sources of funding, such as grants, to meet the cost of improvements to the play area.

In response, Councillor Sanderson confirmed that the money raised in Blyth would be for improvements in that area. He reported that the proposed parking charges would be less that those in North or South Tyneside and most other holiday destinations, where people expected to pay for parking. He undertook to look into

the concerns raised by Councillor Cartie, but stated that if grants had been available they would have been accessed.

The Chairman, whilst noting that the Ranch car park was actually in Seaton Valley Parish, stated his concern regarding the impact the proposals would have on unrestricted or unadopted highway in the vicinity of the car parks, as people sought to park in surrounding areas that were free. He also reported that he had always found a parking space at the Mermaid facility and therefore doubted whether the management of its use was necessary. He advised the Administration to be cautious regarding making promises that money raised in a particular area would be spent in that area. He wondered whether funding could be raised by tighter controls on dog fouling. Having sought confirmation that the restrictions would be in force from 08.00 to 18.00 Monday to Sunday, he was concerned to hear that those who paid a charge were effectively not receiving the first hour free. He also suggested that consideration be given to seasonal restrictions, as many of the car parks across the county would be used almost exclusively by local people during the winter months.

In addition, members suggested that as a compromise, the Administration should consider extending the free period up to two hours and/or reducing the parking charge to £1.50 for the full day. Although they also noted that other organisations such as English Heritage, the National Trust and the National Park charged for parking.

(6) Craster

Councillor Pattison confirmed that this was in her Ward and that residents had expressed to her that they were unhappy at proposals to increase parking charges, although she supported the retention of a free period for dog walkers.

(7) Cresswell

Councillor Dunn reported that she felt that the public were not aware of the consultation in this area. However, she was concerned that even without the restrictions, many cars were parked on the highway causing sight issues. Remedial measures would therefore need to be introduced to militate such behaviour, although she noted that the Drift Inn offered free parking and suggested that most drivers would attempt to use that facility in the first instance.

With regard to Holy Island, the Chairman received confirmation that although the lease for the land for the car park was being renegotiated, arrangements would be made to reclaim council assets if they were to fail.

(8) Annual Parking Pass

The Committee felt that the price rise should be introduced incrementally over a period of years, rather than as a single increase.

(9) Policy

The Chairman referred to the policy implications at the end of the report and stated that the the Council would need to secure the agreement of all the affected Town and Parish Councils to the proposals or change the policy accordingly.

RESOLVED that the Administration be requested to consider all the issues raised by the Committee as part of the overall consultation process regarding parking provision in Northumberland.

43. REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATOR

Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator presented the Committee's Work Programme for 2018/19. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix D).

The Committee agreed that the meeting scheduled for 19 December 2018 be cancelled.

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

44. INFORMATION REPORT - POLICY DIGEST

The Scrutiny Co-ordinator advised the Committee that the Policy Digest gave details of the latest policy briefings, government announcements and ministerial speeches which may be of interest to members. The report could be accessed through the service finder element of County Council's website at www.northumberland.gov.uk.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Chairman _____

Date _____