

Town Centre Car Parking Task & Finish Group

Findings of Task and Finish Group
commissioned by Overview and Scrutiny
Committee

November 2014 – February 2015



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Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to introduce the recommendations of the Town Centre Car Parking Task and Finish Group. The review was commissioned by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee after the Planning Committee had encountered several issues which were raising pressure on facilities in the town centre; these are addressed in the terms of reference which can be found at the start of the report. Whilst these terms of reference also mention the quality of provision and its potential to impact negatively on visitors to Slough and their chances of returning, our discussions with officers noted that this was being resolved and therefore is not central to our recommendations for future activity.

The impact of car parking has several dimensions for local residents, businesses and visitors from outside Slough. It can have an impact on the level of security for their vehicle, the ease with which arrangements can be made by local residents and the likely footfall in town centre shopping facilities. Equally, with future developments such as Crossrail and Heathrow expansion either confirmed or possible, it is necessary to ensure that Slough has a system which can anticipate and accommodate future trends. We hope that our recommendations will assist in creating a parking system which is suited to the needs of Slough and can improve the experience for all.

The Members of the Task and Finish Group would like to thank the officers who have provided information to the Group. I would also like to thank Councillor Joginder Bal, Councillor Andrew Mellor, Councillor Mohammed Nazir and Councillor Wayne Strutton for all their work and support in completing this project.

Councillor Ted Plenty
Chair of the Town Centre Car Parking Task and Finish Group



Section 1: Terms of reference

The following terms of reference were proposed by the Task & Finish Group following a meeting on 14th October 2014, and were agreed by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 11th November 2014.

1. To establish the scale of the demand for parking places in the town centre and Slough Borough Council's ability to respond, with specific reference to the following:
 - 1.1 The balance of new housing between new build flats and conversions from previous buildings with no requirement for planning permission, with specific focus on accommodation without parking provision.
 - 1.2 Usage of potential alternatives (e.g. multi storey car parks) and Slough Borough Council's options for altering this usage.
 - 1.3 Potential increase for demand in the future and the possibility of planning for this in advance.
 - 1.4 Access for emergency / delivery vehicles and users with special requirements (e.g. disabled).
 - 1.5 The provision of parking space for alternative forms of transport (e.g. motorbikes, scooters).
2. To investigate the suitability of parking spaces (e.g. size) and any restrictions on parking (e.g. permitted times).
3. To research the impact of parking on local business and the potential for parking policy to encourage visitors to Slough.
4. To make recommendations on the above matters.

Section 2: Recommendations

The Task and Finish Group would like to propose the following recommendations based on its investigations:

- 1) that the current policy of zero parking be reviewed, with a future ratio to be specified subject to further research by Slough Borough Council (SBC) and justification;
- 2) that the potential hire of, or use of parking permits with time restrictions in neighbouring parking facilities (e.g. Tesco car park) be researched;
- 3) that the time restrictions on areas with single yellow lines be reduced to 6pm in suitable areas (subject to research by SBC);
- 4) that land adoption be used to increase SBC's control of parking (e.g. Kittiwake House, the area in Mill Street outside Foundry Court);
- 5) that the current limit of 5,000 parking spaces be reviewed, using the justification for it at the time of its creation and variations in the situation since this time (e.g. parking at Tesco's, Crossrail) to reappraise the figure;
- 6) that the parking at Slough railway station be removed from SBC's allocation of parking spaces;
- 7) that the potential expansion of car parking facilities at Slough railway station be investigated;
- 8) that the size of loading and unloading bays be reviewed to facilitate their use by larger vehicles; and
- 9) that further research be conducted into the continuation of free parking after 3pm, or cheaper parking through the use of a 'Slough Card', with a view to a potential increase in high street trade.

1 Background to the Review

Introduction

- 1.1 The issue was first referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11th September 2014. This was in response to concerns raised during the summer that the number of proposed flats to be developed in the town centre, including offices to be converted into flats, would put immense strain on the existing system. This would be hampered by the fact that there was currently no minimum requirement for car parking in residential schemes in the centre of Slough.
- 1.2 As result, the Committee agreed to commission the review and then also adopted its proposed terms of reference (as included at the start of this report).
- 1.3 The Task and Finish Group was chaired by Councillor Ted Plenty and membership comprised Councillor Joginder Bal, Councillor Andrew Mellor, Councillor Mohammed Nazir and Councillor Wayne Strutton.

The Approach

- 1.4 Once the terms of reference had been agreed, the Group held a meeting with SBC officers. These represented both transport and planning to cover all related issues (Savio DeCruz – Head of Transport, Kam Hothi – Parking Enforcement Manager and Paul Stimpson - Strategic Lead Planning Policy and Projects). In addition to the information they provided at the meeting on 9th December 2014, they also subsequently provided on the future parking strategy proposals and the history of reviews into parking that SBC had conducted since 2003.
- 1.5 The members of the Group also completed some observations of traffic in the centre of Slough to help inform their views on the pressure points within the system. The views of those Councillors representing the Central ward (Councillor Zaffar Ajaib, Councillor Shafiq Choudhary and Councillor Sabia Hussain) were also sought.
- 1.6 On the basis of the information gathered, the members felt that the current policy of zero parking was not sustainable for the future, and have therefore asked for this matter to be resolved in the first of the recommendations made on page 4 of this report.
- 1.7 In addition, the reason for removing the station from Slough Borough Council's allocation of parking spaces (recommendation 6) is that future Crossrail and WRaTH parking demands may need to be met. As matters stand, SBC could not currently assure this as they would be hampered by the 5,000 limit. Any parking provision increase there would be specific to rail needs, and would be unlikely to significantly impact the town centre itself. As a result, the 5,000 limit should be adjusted accordingly, so numbers of spaces in the town centre can be remain at the same level whilst other facilities are expanded.
- 1.8 Tesco should also be removed from the limit and the centre limit reduced accordingly as Tesco no longer provides either a realistic option for free parking for the town centre or any parking for over 4 hours. This means that it is no longer a significant provider of parking spaces for anyone other than its own customers, and its inclusion in the limit on town centre parking spaces distorts the picture.

2 Information gathered – 9th December 2014

The following information was given by SBC officers at the meeting of the Town Centre Car Parking Task & Finish Group:

- 2.1 The parking at Landmark Place was currently under exploited and also expensive for users. It was intended to alter arrangements at this facility to offer short term parking at cheaper rates. Parking at Buckingham Gardens (which had also been under used) was being offered at a rate of £1 per hour as of 8th December 2014. This arrangement was being undertaken in conjunction with Travelodge. Other issues such as CCTV installation, lighting, signage and pigeons were being resolved as part of the Park Mark scheme (the national award for safer parking) and the possibility of offering night parking was also being investigated.
- 2.2 The rates at the parking facilities in Herschel Street and Hatfield Road offered competitive rates but were under publicised. From 5th January 2015 Herschel Road would provide a 'pay on foot' system to encourage longer stays, with the entrance also to be made more welcoming and 31 CCTV cameras to be fitted. Inspections of the facility would also be increased.
- 2.3 At Hatfield Road a new barrier system had been installed and refurbishment (including lighting) had been completed to improve safety and the overall feel of the facility. Previous problems with anti social behaviour had been resolved by securing the building at night using shutters.
- 2.4 The possibility of cashless parking (which could also be applied to street parking) was one alternative to improve the service offered to visitors. There were other alternatives which could be investigated. One key determinant in the long term success of any plan was the experience which users were offered, which would either encourage or deter return visits. The Grove car park was ready for Park Mark accreditation; in addition, an order for new signage had been placed.
- 2.5 Whilst levels of crime were low in all permanent car parks owned by Slough Borough Council (SBC), temporary car parks remained an issue. The government currently prioritised quality of parking over quantity and SBC was in agreement with this; the controlling of parking was a central ambition. As a result, SBC was now asking for all temporary parking to be of Park Mark standard; surfacing should be flat and durable, with lighting and security also to be high quality. However, SBC was encountering difficulty with enforcing these standards through limitations on planning powers. Minimum standards did need enforcement though in the areas of surfacing and security, as a poor experience for users would discourage return visits to Slough.
- 2.6 The additional issue of short term car parks becoming long term (with some having existed for over four years) had been identified. One solution could be for them to take on the vehicles used in construction work for Crossrail; this had already been factored into plans, with the O2 premises directly in front of the train station being refurbished for the installation of a parking compound. It was important to enforce minimum standards at the time of the application being granted, as it would be hard to force improvements at a later stage. The work on The Curve also led to some accommodation issues (e.g. the loss of the bus lane on the adjoining street).
- 2.7 Impending developments in Slough (e.g. Crossrail) could increase demand, meaning that a balance between quality and quantity would need to be found. The size of bays may also need some evaluation; the present national standard was 2.4 metres wide and 4.8 metres long, but it was accepted that cars had increased in size in recent years. As a result, many bays in Slough were larger than the above standard. Should any bays of extraordinary sizes (e.g. for vans) would require resourcing, and may also require amendments to the maximum heights of vehicles allowed into specific facilities.

- 2.8 The standards mentioned in points 2.1 – 2.7 would require expenditure. It was also hoped that, by lowering fees for users, the increased demand would cover at least some of this outlay. The nature of demand was subject to change; some areas (e.g. Landmark Place) tended to host stays which could last under an hour, whilst Buckingham Gardens' new arrangements mentioned previously were based on the amount of short term parking users wanted at the facility. However, a change in the hours available would require consultation, so the change of tariffs had been chosen as a swifter means of finding a solution.
- 2.9 The parking at the Queensmere Observatory Shopping Centre were under utilised at most times of day, especially in the evening. The design of the area in Church Street near the current branch of Starbucks was being assessed. It was a suitable venue for a taxi rank but equally the problems arising for buses was acknowledged.
- 2.10 The potholes in Hatfield Road were also recognised as a negative for the town; a letter on the issue was about to be sent by SBC. However, this was a private road with each unit on the road having its own allocated area.
- 2.11 Planning law allowed SBC to consider flooding, contamination and traffic ramifications for applications under Section 106. In other areas, SBC did not have the ability to consider potential future impact or issues such as the size of rooms and the number of windows in new developments. However, if floors were added then SBC had the ability to take further action.
- 2.12 The strategic housing assessment would provide a new framework for development. As part of this, SBC would revise its target for new places from 300 to 500 / 600 per year. The results of a study on the matter would be published in May 2015 which would provide a more precise picture of the increased demand for housing. Whatever the results, the limited number of greenfield sites in SBC's area would mean that town centre development was the likely method of delivering these places. At the time that SBC put forward their original plan it was intended to accommodate new places with flats above shops in most cases; however, this required other solutions at the present time, and parking would have to be considered as part of this. The use of parking permits, multi storey car parks, online payment and other alternatives would be examined as part of this. Permits could have variable conditions (e.g. evenings only, leaving places open for day time visitors to Slough, whilst other permits were round-the-clock) whilst the provision of multi story car park season tickets (possibly at discounted prices) may also alleviate the pressure on parking places. The provision of a parking space for a new flat added £30,000 to costs, making this solution impracticable for all new residential buildings.
- 2.13 Kittiwake House had a parking permit scheme, although it may be the case that members had not been alerted to this. Some car parks were leased out to businesses, and incentives to avoid the use of these spaces by local residents on a permanent round-the-clock basis needed to be in place. Beyond these alternatives, more innovative solutions (e.g. car sharing clubs and arrangements) could also be investigated and exploited. London had zipcar sharing arrangements and also free road parking, ideas which may provide some options in Slough. Work in conjunction with other local authorities in Berkshire regarding car clubs could provide some assistance, with all options offering avoidance of additional vehicles on the road worth examining.
- 2.14 The expansion of Heathrow would place further pressure on parking in Slough. There would be a rail link for passengers, but this would probably be more appealing to travellers rather than residents who worked at the airport. In addition, the station has always been considered an exception to standard parking requirements by SBC. The Mass Rapid Transit system was designed to limit the number of private cars. It would offer access to Heathrow for businesses and residents in the Eastern parts of Slough, avoiding the town centre and instead offering a direct route to Western access points at Heathrow. Discussions with Heathrow regarding the scheme should also assist with its design.

- 2.15 The Queensmere Observatory Shopping Centre may also experience a rise in trade. However, it was unlikely to be radically altered to make it a 'regional centre' in the manner of Reading's Oracle, so this increase in demand was very unlikely to be radical. New businesses arriving in Slough would be made aware of the limitations relating to parking and the role they would play in ensuring the best experience for visitors. A further constraint on deliveries, as well as parking space, was the size of lifts within properties. Flats which were conversions from office space would already have forecourts, whilst new developments requiring planning permission would consider the issue as part of the application process. Time restrictions for delivery vehicles were in place and enforced.
- 2.16 In terms of emergency vehicles, Fire Regulations necessitated engine access for properties. However, the issue could still present problems with the area around Mill Street particularly difficult. There was no specific standard for motorbikes and scooters. Spaces could be changed to suit demand, although developers could not be pressurised to make specific provisions prior to completion of new buildings.
- 2.17 Initiatives could be used to make alternative forms of transport more attractive. However, it was important to achieve sufficient demand to make such innovations workable (some authorities had overinvested in bicycle docking stations only to find that their use was infrequent). SBC was introducing bicycle docking stations, but a smaller number in selected locations to establish the level of local demand. Heathrow airport had also been approached to investigate developing a linked bicycle docking service.
- 2.18 Electric vehicle points in parking areas were being extended, albeit on a gradual basis. As with bicycle docking stations, this was to establish the viable level of investment (and also because such facilities reduce the number of parking spaces for conventional cars). Reviews of parking schemes had the encouragement of visitors to use local business as a central consideration. There was an email account and telephone number for businesses to contact SBC and raise relevant points.
- 2.19 In addition, the Task & Finish Group requested the following information:
- The numbers of flats built, the number of times where planning permission has been given but no building has yet taken place and the number of developments which did not require permission;
 - Information on the areas with the highest concentration of new developments;
 - A list of town centre housing developments that had been granted permission and were awaiting construction; and
 - The findings of previous parking scheme reviews.

These were distributed to members of the Task & Finish Group for their final meeting on 10th February 2015.

3 Attendance record

	14 th Oct 14	9 th Dec 14	10 th Feb 15
Cllr Bal	P	Ap	Ap
Cllr Mellor	P	Ap	Ap
Cllr Nazir	P	P	P
Cllr Plenty	P	P	P
Cllr Strutton	P	P	Ap