

Uppingham Town Partnership

Meeting regarding car parking charges in Uppingham 7pm, Wednesday 2 December 2010 Uppingham Town Hall

Present:

Alec Crombie	Chair, Community
Peter Jones	Vice Chair, Rutland County Council
Peter Rees	Uppingham Town Council
Robin Schlich	Uppingham Town Council (for Lindsay Cooper)
Caroline Toms	Community (for Peter Toms)
Phil Wignell	Community
David Casewell	Uppingham Town Council
Marc Oxley	Business
Peter Ind	Rutland County Council

Guest:

Roger Begy	Leader, Rutland County Council
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Officer:

Philip Bailey	Welland Market Towns Manager, Rutland County Council
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Apologies:

Janine Rodger	Rutland County Council
Gillian Agar	Community
Lindsay Cooper	Uppingham Town Council
David Barker	Business

Introduction

Alec Crombie welcomed Roger Begy to the meeting.

Car Parking Issues

1. RB commenced by congratulating Uppingham Town Partnership on getting started. RB was keen that under the 'localism' agenda, Uppingham would be able to look after its own affairs where possible. Management of car parking could potentially form one aspect of this approach.
2. In respect of the specific parking issues, an informal proposal had been made to Town Council representatives on Tuesday 30 November 2010 which was that if car parking charges were to be reduced, Uppingham would need to fund the reduction in income from parking charges. Further to this, if Uppingham wished to take on responsibility for running the car parks in future then this could be an option, but there would be quite a lot of preliminary work to do in terms of negotiating a lease.

3. RB spoke about the issue of parking charges in Uppingham within the context of scale of the budget cuts at the County Council. Given the extent of the cuts coming through, it was felt that if Uppingham wished for car parking charges to be reduced then Uppingham itself would need to fund this.
4. RS asked for clarity about whether car parking charges were still under review. The Scrutiny Panel had made recommendations, but the Cabinet meeting had been postponed twice. RS was concerned that RB was speaking as though a decision had already been made.
5. PR reported that following an informal meeting of the Cabinet he had been consulted along with the Town Clerk, Susan Awcock, on whether the Town Council was willing to consider taking on any of the aspects relating to the car parking in Uppingham. PJ commented that it was useful to sound out the views of the Town Council and the Town Partnership prior to formal Cabinet. The alternative would be for the Cabinet not to consult at all and to simply go ahead and take a decision.
6. MO explained that the main issue from the Uppingham perspective was that the town was not happy with the increase in charges. MO referred to a review of the increase in charges after six months. MO reported that businesses were closing, and business owners were unhappy that parking charges had been increased to the economic detriment of the town. The increase in charges had resulted in a reduction in the number of residents from Uppingham and surrounding villages using the shops. MO observed that parking provision in Uppingham was low in comparison to Oakham – which has 250 spaces at Tesco alone. MO also commented that Uppingham had a smaller retail offer than Oakham and that the similar amounts charged for parking in the two towns did not reflect this. PJ responded that Uppingham had two hours free on-street parking whereas Oakham did not, and that an hour in Uppingham's short stay car park cost 40p. CT commented that long stay car parking cost £1.40 for three hours.
7. PI highlighted that the spaces in the square were for one hour. PI drew attention to the Scrutiny Panel recommendation for a six month trial period where 20p could be charged for an hour stay in a short stay car park. PI suggested that there should also be discussion with the Co-op as they are a big beneficiary of the car park to the side of their store. At one time the Co-op reimbursed the cost of shoppers' parking.
8. PI expressed concern that there was a danger that the cost of car parking could be added to the town precept and thereby residents would be charged regardless of whether or not they used the car parks. MO said that as there was an election next May the balance of power may change and therefore it would be difficult for any of the councils to make any long-term arrangements.
9. RB made the point that if Rutland County Council reduced charges in Uppingham, then Oakham would request cuts in charges. The purpose of the six month review was to ask at the end of it whether there was another way of doing it. It was with the Town Council to come back on this. PJ explained that one of the benefits of a Town Partnership was its capacity to act as a go

between. The Town Partnership had the ability to talk to everyone and find a way of possibly finding a reduction in the cost of car parking. The beauty of a six month trial period of a 20p charge for an hour of short stay parking would be that whoever was elected could make the decision about whether or not to stick with it.

10. RS stressed that the overriding issue was that all of the car parking charges in Uppingham were much too high. A proper review had not been carried out and the Cabinet meeting was still to come. Lindsay Cooper and RS had worked together to produce a range of statistics about the usage of the car parks. The statistics and accompanying notes were circulated for information. Amongst the various statistics cited, RS indicated that the increase in charges had led to an approximate 50% decrease in the number of parking tickets sold for one or two hours. In Oakham the increase in the parking charges had been much lower and had had very little effect on the number of parking tickets sold. Parking on-street in Uppingham had stayed the same and in the car parks had halved. RS contended that the effect had been precisely what officers had said would be the case and that he was not prepared to accept that the issue of excessive parking charges could not be looked into again.
11. RB stated that it was important to consider footfall rather than simply the number people using the car parks. RB said that there were three options i) do nothing ii) Uppingham Town Council contributes iii) Uppingham community assists. RS was of the view that the Town Council needed to be fully informed and there had been no formal proposal. There should be a sequential approach. Uppingham would need to know the decision of the Cabinet before deciding what to do at the next stage. PR concurred that it was difficult to make any decisions when Uppingham Town Council had not met to discuss any of the issues.
12. There was discussion about the use of the car park next to the Co-op. MO indicated that the car park was at its busiest from 6pm-8pm when there were no car parking charges. Reference was then made to the competition Uppingham faces from centres such as Oakham, Corby, Stamford and Market Harborough. MO maintained that the idea should be try to get a level playing field to encourage people to shop in Uppingham and Oakham.
13. PJ stated that sales had dropped in Oakham and that there can be very many reasons why trade drops. The question would be how to go about judging the impact of reduced car parking charges on trade. Indications on the health of local trade are generally by word of mouth. The only robust way to even start assessing the impact on trade would be comparison against national averages. A trial period of reduced parking charges would need to be able to demonstrate that it had achieved a sufficiently beneficial effect.
14. AC asked if Oakham was also being approached about similar car parking options, and further to this, commented that the car parking charges in Uppingham had been put up disproportionately in comparison to Oakham. RB responded that transferring the responsibility for running car parks had been mooted to Oakham, and that there would always be a difference when considering percentage increases against nominal increases. RB added that in

Oakham there was support for the parking charges as it was acknowledged as an effective means of enabling throughput and placing restrictions on people parking all day.

15. RS agreed that car parking was unsustainable without charging being applied. However, prior to the increased charges a lot of time had been put into thinking through the best possible regime in Uppingham. This regime had been upset and the car parks were no longer 'nicely full'. DC commented that Cabinet must be aware that local opinion was not in favour of the current parking charges given that Uppingham Town Council, Uppingham Town Partnership, Uppingham First and the RCC Scrutiny Panel were not in favour of the approach that had been taken.
16. PW asked about the possible scenario under which the car parks could actually be run by Uppingham. The general view was that such an arrangement would require a lot of work to progress, including a detailed business planning and a rental agreement. RS commented on the lack of staffing capacity at the Town Council to take on additional functions such as managing car parks.
17. With regards to the shortfall relating to the option for 20p for an hour stay, PR said that it was estimated that £3,500 would be lost during a six month trial period. If the usage went up, the shortfall would reduce. PI also expressed interest in consideration being given to parking permits which could be sold perhaps as annual season tickets.
18. RS indicated that there were too many long stay spaces in proportion to the number of short stay spaces which had led some people to purchase more expensive tickets at peak times simply because of a lack of short stay spaces. RS was of the view that the additional charge on market day [Friday] for long stay parking had been an awful approach and had frightened people out of these car parks. MO stated that he had received complaints from residents about parking on Gainsborough Road and the Quadrant on market day.
19. PJ indicated that PB's role involved working with a range of market towns in the Welland area and that information he can gather about parking matters in other towns could be helpful in terms of gaining a broader understanding of common issues. PB agreed to source information from other towns. DC emphasised the importance of understanding that other towns nearby have free off-street car parking in the form of large supermarkets car parks, whereas Uppingham does not have this provision.
20. RB asked if the Partnership would be in favour of the removal of parking charges on the Saturday before Christmas at the long stay car park at Mercer's Yard. The response of the Partnership was positive. RB would seek to arrange for this to run from 10am on the Saturday before Christmas (18 December 2010).
21. MO enquired about the possibility of extra car parking spaces on Seaton Road. RB stated that this was being actively looked at. PB referred to a request from David Barker for consideration to be given to the possibility of increasing the amount of long stay car parking to those working in Uppingham by extending

the current parking space line further away from the Town Council offices. MO stated that he would respond to DB as he had dealt with this matter previously.

22. DC suggested that there could be some merit in consideration being given to a package of practical measures to improve the car parking situation in Uppingham which would be stronger if Rutland County Council made a contribution to a joint approach. MO suggested that it would be important to have a strong publicity campaign to encourage people to come back and use the car parks. RB's offer to make contact with the Co-op hierarchy to find out what could be done from their end in respect of car parking was accepted as a helpful course of action.