



# Overview and Scrutiny Board

## Recreation Road South Car Park Task Group

**AUGUST 2011**  
**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD**  
Supporting Officer: Amanda Scarce



**Bromsgrove**  
District Council  
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## **1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 1.1 An Overview and Scrutiny Proposal Form (Appendix 1) relating to Recreation Road Car Park South was submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting on 11th July 2011, by Councillor S. P. Shannon.
- 1.2 The Board was informed that complaints had been received from individual taxi drivers and the Chairman of the Taxi Drivers Association in respect of the time limit set for the pick up of passengers at Recreation Road South Car Park.
- 1.3 The Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Cultural and Environmental Services advised Members during the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting that an extension, from 10 to 15 minutes, of the drivers' pick up/drop time was being considered. The Board made a recommendation to Cabinet that the drivers' pick up/drop off time limit be extended to 15 minutes with immediate effect. At the Cabinet meeting held on 20th July 2011 the recommendation was accepted.
- 1.4 Another issue which had been raised referred to the strict manner in which attendants issued Excess Charge Notices for vehicles parked incorrectly and the appeal system that was in place. Councillor Shannon had informed the Board that he had both written and verbal evidence to substantiate the claims. Other Members commented that they had also received complaints from residents along similar lines.
- 1.5 Members were also advised that the drainage/flooding issue raised in the Topic Proposal had been reported to Worcestershire County Council (WCC) and the problem had been addressed.
- 1.6 Although the Overview and Scrutiny Topic Proposal only covered the pick up/drop off system for taxi/private hire operators and the flooding/drainage issues at the Market Street site of the car park, following discussion it was agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Board that a Task Group would be established to scrutinise the operation of the Recreation Road South Car Park and that Councillor Shannon would be appointed Chairman.

## 2. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

<b>Recommendation 1</b>	That a PR exercise be carried out to promote the Recreation Road South Car Park (and all other car parks) and to highlight the qualities of the car parks and the benefits of the Pay on Foot system.
<b>Financial Implications</b>	There are no financial implications arising from this.
<b>Resource Implications</b>	Officer time will be required to ensure this recommendation is carried through.

<b>Recommendation 2</b>	That the standard letter templates used by the Car Parking Team be reviewed to ensure they are in line with the Customer Service Strategy guidelines.
<b>Financial Implications</b>	There are no financial implications arising from this.
<b>Resource Implications</b>	Officer time will be required to ensure this recommendation is carried through.

<b>Recommendation 3</b>	That the Pay on Foot system be expanded to other car parks wherever possible.
<b>Financial Implications</b>	The only car parks that could feasibly accommodate Pay on Foot would be School Drive/Dolphin Centre (if joined) and the Hanover Street car park. The estimated cost of which would be between £200k and £230k.
<b>Resource Implications</b>	Officer time will be required to ensure this recommendation is carried through.

<b>Recommendation 4</b>	That free car parking be provided (in all car parks) all day on a Sunday in order to encourage people to visit the town centre.
<b>Financial Implications</b>	The <u>estimated</u> cost to introduce free Sunday parking would be £70k i.e. annual loss of revenue.
<b>Resource Implications</b>	Officer time will be required to ensure this recommendation is carried through.

<b>Recommendation 5</b>	That free car parking be provided (in all car parks) after 7.00 p.m. in the evening in order to encourage people to visit the town centre.
<b>Financial Implications</b>	The <u>estimated</u> costs of introducing free evening parking would be £140k i.e. annual loss of revenue.
<b>Resource Implications</b>	Officer time will be required to ensure this recommendation is carried through.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

- 3.1 In accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Board Inquiry/Task Group Procedure Guidelines (endorsed by the Overview and Scrutiny Board at the meeting held on 1st March 2011) following the meeting held on 11th July 2011 copies of the completed Topic Proposal Form were circulated amongst non-Cabinet Members for consideration, with the request that Members interested in participating in the Task Group contact the Committee Services Officer by 10.00 a.m. on 18th July 2011. Membership of the Task Group is detailed below:

Councillor S. P. Shannon (Chairman)  
Councillor C. J. Bloore  
Councillor R. Laight  
Councillor P. Lammas  
Councillor P. M. McDonald  
Councillor L. Mallett

- 3.2 There were a total of four Task Group meetings. During the first meeting held on 21st July 2011 an Overview and Scrutiny Exercise Scoping Checklist, which included the terms of reference of the task group (Appendix 2), was completed and the following areas of investigation were agreed:

- ❖ A comparison of usage, income and penalty charges on Recreation Road South Car Park for 2008/09 and 2010/11.
- ❖ The role of the Civil Enforcement Officers and the guidelines they adhered to.
- ❖ The penalty charge appeals process and the Standard letter templates used.

#### **4. SUMMARY OF INVESTIGATIONS**

- 4.1 The Task Group Members had all experienced negative comments from residents in respect of the operation of the car parks throughout the district and from the limited knowledge that they had, felt some sympathy towards the car park users. The verbal feedback they had received included the stringent manner in which excess parking charges were issued and the way in which appeals against these charges were handled, both verbally and in writing. The Task Group was concerned that this negative attitude, which was often well publicized in the local press, was affecting the use of the car parks and the reputation of the Council.

The Task Group therefore requested the following information at the meeting held on 21st July 2011:

- ❖ Civil Enforcement Officer Guidelines
- ❖ Excess Charge Appeal Standard Letter Templates
- ❖ Income from parking charges on Recreation Road South Car Park
- ❖ Total income from parking compared with excess charge revenue on Recreation Road South Car Park.
- ❖ Comparison with other Councils regarding enforcement activities on Pay on Foot car parks.
- ❖ Reasons for excess charges on Recreation Road South Car Park

#### **Pay on Foot Car Parking**

- 4.2 From the evidence received at the meeting held on 8th August 2011 (see Appendix 3) the Task Group were able to ascertain that the number of excess charge notices issued had decreased from 0.35% of overall ticket sales in 2008/09 to 0.08% in 2010/11. Although this meant a reduction in revenue to the Council it showed that the Pay on Foot system reduced the opportunity for a car park user to receive an excess charge and was therefore more “customer friendly”. This was confirmed by further evidence provided by the Car Parks Manager, who informed the Task Group that a recent customer satisfaction survey carried out by the Car Park Team showed a satisfaction rate with Pay on Foot parking of approximately 91%. The survey also showed that nearly 99% of those asked preferred a Pay on Foot system.

The Task Group was concerned that from the statistical evidence provided there was a reduction in tickets sales in comparison to 2008/09. Officers informed Members that this was in line with the national trend, which was due to the current economic downturn. Although it was accepted by the Task Group that there was a national downturn in car park usage, it was felt that every endeavour should be made to encourage residents and visitors to use the Council’s car park facilities, which would in turn assist with encouraging economic growth within the town centre.



The Task Group was also concerned that charging for car parking up to 10.00 p.m. and on a Sunday also contributed towards the negative image of car parking in the District, as in many areas this was either free or provided at a reduced rate. Again, the Task Group Members agreed this did not encourage visitors to the town centre. It was felt that free parking after 7.00 p.m. and on a Sunday would be more acceptable and appreciated by residents and visitors. The Task Group was made aware of the legal implications of any changes, as the Car Parking Order which was a legal document would need to be amended and the loss of income against operational costs of the car parks would also need to be taken into consideration.

The Car Park Manager explained to the Task Group that to monitor and compare the Council's car parking service he regularly attended the Midlands Car Parking Forum, where he was able to discuss specific issues and make comparisons with other car parks managers across the region. However, it was difficult to make some comparisons in respect of the pay on foot scheme as very few authorities operated a car park adjacent to a major supermarket using this system.

The Task Group visited the Recreation Road South Car Park and reported that they found it of high quality, well illuminated and with good CCTV coverage and with clear well positioned signage, giving clear guidelines on using the car park. It was felt that this should be promoted to encourage an increased use of this and other car parks throughout the District.

The Task Group therefore recommends the following:

<b><u>Recommendation 1</u></b>	
That a PR exercise be carried out to promote the Recreation Road South Car Park (and all other car parks) and to highlight the qualities of the car parks and the benefits of the Pay On Foot system.	
<b>Financial Implications</b>	There are no financial implications arising from this.
<b>Resource Implications</b>	Officer time will be required to ensure this recommendation is carried through.

<b><u>Recommendation 3</u></b>	
That the Pay on Foot system be expanded to other car parks wherever possible.	
<b>Financial Implications</b>	The only car parks that could feasibly accommodate Pay on Foot would be School Drive/Dolphin Centre (if joined) and the Hanover Street car park. The estimated cost of which would be between £200k and £230k.
<b>Resource Implications</b>	Officer time will be required to ensure this recommendation is carried through.

<b><u>Recommendation 4</u></b>	
That free car parking be provided (in all car parks) all day on a Sunday in order to encourage people to visit the town centre.	
<b>Financial Implications</b>	The <u>estimated</u> cost to introduce free Sunday parking would be £70k i.e. annual loss of revenue.
<b>Resource Implications</b>	Officer time will be required to ensure this recommendation is carried through.

<b><u>Recommendation 5</u></b>	
That free car parking be provided (in all car parks) after 7.00 p.m. in the evening in order to encourage people to visit the town centre.	
<b>Financial Implications</b>	The <u>estimated</u> costs of introducing free evening parking would be £140k i.e. annual loss of revenue.
<b>Resource Implications</b>	Officer time will be required to ensure this recommendation is carried through.

### **Excess Charge Notices**

- 4.3 As detailed in section 4.1 of this report, the Task Group Members had all experienced negative and critical comments from residents in respect of the operation of the car parks through out the district and from the limited knowledge that they had, felt some sympathy towards the car park users.

The Task Group questioned the Environmental Business Development Manager and the Car Parks Manager on the manner and the circumstances in which Excess Charge Notices were issued. The Task Group was concerned that the Civil Enforcement Officers were given targets to reach in respect of the issue of these Notices. Both the Car Parks Manager and Environmental Business Development Manager assured the Task Group that this certainly was not the case and provided the Task Group with a copy of the Civil Enforcement Officer Training and Development Manual. From this document it was clear that the Civil Enforcement Officers were provided with detailed information on what was expected of them and clear guidelines on how to carry out their duties. The Car Parks Manager informed Members that the Civil Enforcement Officers' role did not merely involve enforcement, but covered the Shop Mobility scheme, dealing with general enquiries and problems with both the pay and display and pay on foot car parks and a lot of interaction helping people, by providing directions for example. During the meeting held on 8th August 2011 the Task Group asked for clarification on several areas of contention and was provided with the following responses:

- ❖ A vehicle wheel/tyre had to be completely over the white line of a parking bay before an Excess Charge Notice was issued.

- ❖ There was a small element of “discretion” for time limited tickets (although not relevant to Recreation Road South Car Park as it was Pay on Foot).
- ❖ Appeals made in respect of Excess Charge Notices were dealt with sympathetically (approximately 42% being overturned).

The Task Group was also given detailed information on the three stages of the Excess Charge Notice appeal process.

Councillor Shannon provided the Task Group with a copy of a standard letter a resident had provided him with in respect of an appeal against an Excess Charge Notice and which the Task Group felt could have been worded in a more appropriate manner. The Task Group therefore requested sight of the standard letter templates used at each stage of an appeal against an Excess Charge Notice. These were provided at the meeting held on 8th August 2011 and although adequate, the Task Group felt that they would benefit from a review in order to ensure they were in line with the Council's general guidelines.

The Task Group therefore recommends:

<b>Recommendation 2</b>	
That the standard letter templates used by the Car Parking Team be reviewed to ensure they are in line with the Customer Service Strategy guidelines.	
<b>Financial Implications</b>	There are no financial implications arising from this.
<b>Resource Implications</b>	Officer time will be required to ensure this recommendation is carried through.

**THE TASK GROUP ASKED FOR THE FOLLOWING TO BE NOTED AND FOR  
PROGRESS UP DATES TO BE GIVEN TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
BOARD:**

- (a) During the Task Group meeting held on 8th August 2011, Members were asked to note that the issue of drainage/flooding at Recreation Road South Car Park had not been resolved (as noted in section 1.5 of this report) as first thought and officers would continue to work with Worcestershire County Council to resolve this issue.
- (b) Although not included within the terms of reference of the Task Group, Members attention was drawn to a small area of the car park (believed to be by/near the shopping trolley area) which also flooded and asked that this be noted and investigated through the car park maintenance programme.
- (c) Members were also advised at the meeting held on 8th August 2011 that letters would be sent out w/c 8th August 2011 to all taxi drivers in respect of section 1.3 of this report.

## 5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 Having considered the evidence provided by officers, Members had gained a good understanding of the operation of the car park and the role of the Civil Enforcement Officers.

The Task Group acknowledged that:

- ❖ The car park was of good quality (well illuminated and covered by CCTV).
- ❖ Signage was clear and well placed (Members had visited the site).
- ❖ The Pay on Foot system had reduced the number of penalty charges issued (2008/09 2,273 and in 2010/11 462).
- ❖ The customer satisfaction rate for the car park was high (approximately 91% following a recent survey conducted by the Car Parks Manager. The survey also showed that almost 99% of asked preferred a pay on foot system).
- ❖ A vehicle tyre had to be completely over the white line of a parking bay before a penalty charge notice would be issued.
- ❖ There was a small element of “discretion” for time limited tickets (although not relevant to Recreation Road Car Park South as it was pay on foot).
- ❖ Appeals made in respect of penalty charges were dealt with sympathetically (with approximately 42% being overturned).

- 5.2 The Task Group Members were unanimous in the conclusion that the Pay on Foot system at Recreation Road South Car Park was beneficial to car park users as it reduced the number of penalty charges issued, enabled users to only pay for the amount of time they spent in the car park and had clear signage to assist them.

- 5.3 Task Group Members conceded that they had begun the Task Group with a preconceived view of Recreation Road South Car Park and car parking facilities generally provided by the Council. However, after hearing and looking at the evidence provided by Officers it was agreed that the negative view was incorrect and that appropriate work needed to be carried out to change the perception of residents and visitors to the area in order to increase use of the car parks.

## 6. **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

- 6.1 The Task Group wishes to acknowledge, in particular, the assistance received from the Environmental Business Development Manager for his help and support with the Task Group from the start of the investigations and all the way through to the end of the investigation when this report was finalised.
- 6.2 The Task Group also wishes to thank the Car Parks Manager for providing written evidence and attending the Task Group meeting on 8th August to give evidence.

7. **SUPPORTING BACKGROUND PAPERS**

BDC Civil Enforcement Officer Training and Development Manual

BDC Car Parking Charter

Excess Charge Notice Appeal Standard Letter Templates

Data from Car Parking Customer Satisfaction Survey



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TOPIC PROPOSAL

<b>Name of Proposer: Sean Shannon</b>	
_____	
<b>Tel No: _01527 878736 / 07790707622_____ Email: <a href="mailto:s.shannon@bromsgrove.gov.uk">s.shannon@bromsgrove.gov.uk</a></b>	
<b>Date: _12/6/2011_____</b>	
<b>Title of Proposed Topic:</b>	Review of Recreation Rd parking operations
<b>Specific subject areas to be investigated:</b>	1 Entry/exit system for taxi/private hire operators. 2 Flooding/drainage issues Market St side of car park.
<b>Reasons why this subject should be considered:</b>	Both problems long standing and unresolved, generating complaints from car park users, pedestrians, town centre visitors and taxi & private hire operators.
<b>Evidence to support the need for this particular investigation:</b>	Verbal from Taxi operators and Taxi Operators Association. Photographs. Correspondence between S.Martin & S.Shannon
<b>Council priorities it links to:</b>	Promote town centre as nice place to visit and good place to do business.
<b>Possible key outcomes: (i.e. what do you anticipate could be achieved?)</b>	Introduce change to Taxi /P.H. access arrangements. Installation of drainage system to Market St side of car park to halt illegal discharge of surface water on to Market St pavements.

**Please indicate if any of the following apply to the proposed subject area:**

CRITERIA	NO		YES		Why?
Is it a priority issue for the Council or the Local Strategic Partnership?			y		<i>Inaction over both issues has generated complaints and adverse comments from taxi trade and town centre visitors</i>
Is it an important issue for local residents?			y		Affects taxi users and town centre visitors in wet weather.
Is it a topic where Overview and Scrutiny could feasibly and constructively make recommendations?			y		Surely this is main function of the Board
Is it a topic where external review would			y		Broader input of opinion would be



be helpful?			beneficial.
Is it a topic where a review could be made in time to make recommendations for the executive decision making process?		<b>y</b>	Would assume this is possible.
Is it a poorly performing service?	*	*	This car park produces large cash income for the Council but also generates large number of complaints.
Is it a review that could render significant savings or value for money?		<b>n</b>	Value could be gained from reduction of conflict situation. Shoppers who have had their taxi journeys disrupted or visitors to town centre who have been “soaked to the skin” while waiting to use Market St pedestrian crossing might return to Bromsgrove.
Is the topic strategic in scope?		<b>n</b>	Both issues could be more accurately described as “retrospective correction” than strategic.



## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY EXERCISE SCOPING CHECKLIST

This form is to assist Members to scope the overview and scrutiny exercise in a focused way and to identify the key issues it wishes to investigate.

- Topic: **Review of Recreation Road Car Park**

- Specific subject areas to be investigated:

- The issue of penalty notices and enforcement guidelines
- The Three Stages of the Appeals process
- Standard letter templates used
- Comparison of penalty charges and overall charges before and after installation of the pay on foot system.

- Possible key outcomes:  
 (i.e. please state what Members hope to achieve through this investigation)

That a review of the civil enforcement officers' guidelines, standard letter templates in all 3 stages of the appeal system and a review of the signage at the Recreation Road Car Park be undertaken to assist in the improvement of the Council's perception by residents and visitors to Bromsgrove.

- Should the relevant Portfolio Holder(s) be invited to give evidence?  
**YES/NO\***

- Which officers should be invited to give evidence?  
 (Please state name of officer and/or job title)

Head of Environmental Services  
 Car Parks Manager

- Should any external witnesses be invited to give evidence? **NO\***  
 If so, who and from which organisations?

- What key documents/data/reports will be required?

Data in respect of income and expenditure for car park together with usage and a comparison with other a similar car park from another authority.  
Civil Enforcement Officers' Guidelines  
Standard Letter Templates

- Is it anticipated that any site visits will be required? **YES**  
If so, where should members visit?

Visit to Recreation Road South Car Park to look at the signage.

- Should a period of public consultation form part of the exercise?  
**YES/NO\***

If so, on what should the public be consulted?

Insufficient time to carry out a consultation. However, an article has appeared in the local paper inviting comments from residents.

(Please Note: A separate press release requesting general comments/suggestions from the public will be issued in the normal way at the beginning of the investigation if appropriate.)

- Have other authorities carried out similar overview and scrutiny exercises?  
**YES/NO\***

If so, which authorities?

Not as far as we are aware.

- Will the investigation cross the District boundary? **NO\***  
If so, should any other authorities be invited to participate?

**YES/NO\***

If yes, please state which authorities:

N/A

- Would it be appropriate to co-opt anyone on to the Task Group/Board whilst the Overview and Scrutiny exercise is being carried out? **NO\***

If so, who and from which organisations?

- What do you anticipate the timetable will be for the Overview and Scrutiny exercise?

In order for the task group report to feed into the Shared Services Business Plan (which goes to Cabinet on 7th September 2011) it will need to be completed by 18th August 2011.

## Appendix 3

Number of customers receiving excess charges as a percentage of overall usage:

<b><u>2010/2011</u></b>		<b><u>2008/2009</u></b>	
Tickets issued on RRS:	611834	Tickets sold on RRS:	656088
Excess charges issued:	462	Excess charged issued:	2273
Percentage:	<u>0.08%</u>	Percentage:	<u>0.35%</u>

Income from parking charges on Recreation Road South:

<b><u>2010/2011</u></b>		<b><u>2008/2009</u></b>	
Excess charge revenue:	<u>£15,305</u>	Excess charge revenue:	<u>£65,213</u>

Total income from parking compared with excess charge revenue on Recreation Road South:

<b><u>2010/2011</u></b>		<b><u>2008/2009</u></b>	
Excess charge revenue:	£ 15,305	Excess charge revenue:	£ 65,213
Ticket sales (net):	£512,774	Ticket sales:	£579,772
Total revenue:	£528,079	Total revenue:	£644,985
Percentage:	<u>3%</u>	Percentage:	<u>10%</u>

### Additional Information

Reasons for excess charges on Recreation Road South

<b><u>2008/2009</u></b>		
No blue badge displayed	62	3%
Expired ticket	904	40%
No ticket	1110	49%
Expired permit	1	0%
Wrong use of space	18	1%
Exceeded time limit	1	0%
Not wholly in a bay	176	8%
Not listed	1	0%
	<u>2273</u>	

<b><u>2010/2011</u></b>		
No blue badge displayed*	288	62%
Expired ticket	0	0%
No ticket	4	1%
Expired permit	0	0%
Wrong use of space	5	1%
Exceeded time limit**	82	18%
Not wholly in a bay***	83	18%
Not listed	0	0%
	<u>462</u>	

\*Officers have doubled in number, and the Duty Officer will patrol the pay on foot car parks when three officers are in. The opportunity to park without displaying a valid blue badge has been significantly decreased.

\*\* Exceeding the maximum time is now carried out automatically and all offences are detected.

\*\*\* A number of vehicles were previously booked for parking on zig-zags at the front of the store – the need for drivers to do this has diminished as drivers pay when they leave.



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**Bromsgrove  
District Council**

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**EQUALITY  
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