

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF TOWN CENTRE AND CAR PARKS TASK AND FINISH
SCRUTINY PANEL
HELD ON MONDAY, 2 OCTOBER 2006
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, EPPING
AT 7.00 - 9.00 PM**

Members Present:	M Colling (Chairman), Mrs R Gadsby (Vice-Chairman), Mrs P Brooks, A Lee, P McMillan, Mrs P Richardson, D Stallan and K Wright
Other members present:	A Green and Mrs A Grigg
Apologies for Absence:	K Angold-Stephens and M Woollard
Officers Present	J Gilbert (Head of Environmental Services), J Preston (Head of Planning and Economic Development) and Z Folley (Democratic Services Assistant)
Also in attendance:	C Crudington (Consultant)

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(a) Pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct, Councillor M Colling declared a general personal interest by virtue of being a member of the Epping Town Centre Partnership. The Councillor declared that his interest was not prejudicial and indicated that he would remain in the meeting for the consideration and voting on the items.

(b) Pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct, Councillor K Wright declared a general personal interest by virtue of being a member of the Ongar Town Centre Forum. The Councillor declared that his interest was not prejudicial and indicated that he would remain in the meeting for the consideration and voting on the items.

(c) Pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct, Councillor A Lee declared a general personal interest by virtue of being a member of the Loughton High Road Town Centre Partnership. The Councillor declared that his interest was not prejudicial and indicated that he would remain in the meeting for the consideration and voting on the items.

2. SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

The Panel were asked to determine the scope of their review and a Terms of Reference. The Panel had before them a series of issues for consideration and a copy of the scrutiny review proposals submitted by Councillor J Whitehouse which led to the setting up of the Panel.

(a) Car Parking

In view of the wide range of issues, the Panel agreed that issues should be prioritise and that those likely to have budgetary implications should be deal with first for

submission to the 2007/08 budget making process. The Panel agreed that priority be given to the consideration of antisocial behaviour in car parks and also the new parking enforcement contract.

In relation to anti social behaviour issues, it was suggested that consideration be given to best practice elsewhere and whether solutions could be transferred to the District. An option was to explore the approach adopted by Harlow Council.

It was also proposed that a joint meeting should take place between the Panel and the Task and Finish Panel on Crime and Disorder issues to consider joint matters. The Chairman undertook to liaise with Councillor Cohen, the Chairman of the Panel, to agree details. It was agreed that an item be placed in the Members Bulletin and members of both Panels would be invited to attend.

(b) Town Centres

In terms of desired outcomes, the Panel suggested there should be a better balance between retail and other uses for outlets. A coordinated approach should be adopted to the various aspects. Issues for consideration was how business could be attracted, reasons for shop closures, the powers available to the Panel, including those in the planning process bearing in mind the Council had recently updated the Local Plan. Consideration could also be given to events for promoting local business. The Panel could seek to identify public views.

Having considered the issues, the Panel agreed a terms of reference for consideration and endorsement by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5 October 2006.

ACTION

Democratic Services to circulate terms of reference for consideration at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5 October 2006

Chairman to contact Chairman of Crime and Disorder Task and Finish Panel.

3. WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel were asked to determine a work programme.

It was agreed that the next meeting on 17 October 2006 would consider the consultants stage one report for the new car parking enforcement contract. It was also agreed that a letter be sent to Local Councils to ascertain views on the contract and that the results be considered at the following meeting on 7 November 2006 together with the consultants stage two report.

It was agreed that the consideration of anti-social behaviour in car parks be given high priority as there was some pressure to agree arrangements for the use of new technology which had budgetary implications.

It was agreed that consideration of the development of car parks be deferred until more urgent issues requiring bids to the forthcoming budget making process had been dealt with.

ACTION:

Democratic Services to update work programme.

4. FREE SATURDAY PARKING

The Head of Environmental Services introduced the report to be submitted to the Cabinet in November 2006. The report requested that free car parking be provided on Saturdays in the Council's long stay and combined car parks and noted the financial consequences. He reported the income from existing Saturday parking, enforcement issues, and resource implications.

It was cautioned that free spaces could be used by out of town shoppers/commuters therefore might not directly benefit the local economy. It was questioned whether the estimated costs of the scheme could be better spent on enhancing Town Centres.

It was suggested that the costs/saving generated by the enforcement arrangements for existing free parking schemes be identified to provide a flavour of the likely financial implications of the proposals and enforcement action. The Head of Environmental Services undertook to liaise with the Council's car parking contractor to identify this information.

It was suggested that consideration should be given to the arrangements in place elsewhere. Reference was made to a retail scheme used in Waltham Forest designed to facilitate the local economy. Consultation could take place with the Authority to ascertain their issues and solutions.

The Panel supported the proposals on the basis that they could enhance the viability of District Town Centres. Members however questioned how the regime would be enforced to ensure that free spaces were used for local not commuting purposes.

The Head of Planning and Economic Development referred to the Local Authority Business Growth Incentive scheme. He stated that as part of this scheme, the Authority had been allocated a grant of £415,000 for facilitating economic growth. Cabinet had considered the grant. The Portfolio Holder had asked for a further report on how this funding could be spent. The Panel suggested that the funding should be used to resource the scheme.

The Panel also recommended that the scheme should be reviewed on a regular basis.

In considering this, the Panel thought that it should be made clear that the scheme was not an experiment and that any review should not call into question the principle of the scheme but merely concentrate on operational aspects to identify whether the identified aims were being achieved and any actions required to address problems.

RECOMMENDED TO THE CABINET:

- (1) To provide free car parking on Saturdays in the Council's long stay and combined car parks as set out in paragraph 11 of the report;**
- (2) To make any necessary changes to the existing traffic regulation orders; and**

(3) To note the revenue consequences of foregone income of approximately £75,150 (CSB) per annum and the one off cost of £10,000 (DDF) for signage and traffic regulation orders and that consideration be given to the use of Local Authority Business Growth Incentive' grant (LABGI) in order to replace that lost income

(4) That the free Saturday car parking arrangements be kept under operational review and that Cabinet receive reports from time to time

5. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Noted that the next meeting of the Panel would be held on 17October 2006 at 7.00pm in CR1.