

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ECONOMY
8 SEPTEMBER 2005**

PARKING IN TOPSHAM

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report seeks Members' views on the principle of expanding parking at Holman Way, Topsham and to introduce charges for the use of that car park. It also considers a number of other possible parking measures in the town.

2 INFORMATION

- 2.1 As Members are fully aware, the availability of parking in Topsham is extremely limited with four comparatively small public off-street car parks, limited kerbside parking and limited residential off-street parking within the town. Local Ward Members have raised the issue on a number of occasions over the last few years of seeking any means to expand the parking provision and yet very few obvious opportunities present themselves without impinging on the limited public open space that is available within the town. There are also a significant number of local people who oppose any increase in parking if there is any adverse environmental consequence and indeed a general planning view which would question the logic of increasing the parking stock at a time of promoting sustainable transport. This paper puts forward the broad options and leave it for Members to advise on the appropriate way forward. It also briefly refers to other parking issues within the town to provide some context for the current debate.
- 2.2 Holman Way car park currently comprises some 71 spaces which are free but for which the maximum stay is 24 hours, plus an area of parking for a total of 11 vehicles owned and marked out for the Surgery at the northern edge of the site. The current layout is fairly poor and does not make best use of the available space. A series of snapshot surveys in February indicated an average occupancy of 87% of the spaces. Occupancy is likely to be higher in the summer and in the evening and at weekends.
- 2.3 The critical issue in determining whether additional space can be provided is whether or not a tree belt between the car park and Altamira should be removed. These trees (sucker growth poplar) are reaching maturity and have grown in close proximity to each other resulting in tall, thin specimens. The Car Parks Manager has applied for consent to fell these trees and 23 objections have been received and 10 representations in support. Individually these trees are poor but as a group they make an important contribution to the visual amenity of the area. The Tree Officer advises that owing to the form, age and type of tree, branches will start to break away from their crowns in future years and therefore, given the location of the trees next to a busy car park, they will require removal. Poplar trees of this type do not respond well to pruning. Looked at from a landscape viewpoint, preference would be to remove these trees over a number of years and allow the under storey to develop to replace the existing Poplars

with the possibility of some supplementary planting. In addition to the visual amenity of the trees, the area is a useful wildlife habitat and an important corridor supporting the biodiversity of the area. Devon Wildlife Trust are carrying out a survey of this area on behalf of those preparing the Topsham Community Plan. The car park is in the Topsham Conservation Area for which there is a duty for any proposals to preserve or enhance the area.

- 2.4 Set against this, the car park could be expanded into this area following the removal of the trees, with a three metre wide landscape belt and boundary wall. With a re-design of the entrance and exit arrangements, a total of up to 115 spaces could be achieved but this would also involve the loss of the screening on to Holman Way. This would therefore provide an increase of some 30 or so parking spaces.
- 2.5 No cost estimates for the creation of an extended car park with appropriate landscaping and boundary treatment have yet been produced. A more detailed engineering survey would be needed, but this can only be reliably carried out if there is significant clearance of growth in the landscaped area.
- 2.6 If Members wished to proceed with this, it is recommended that they consider the introduction of charges for Holman Way by introducing charges of 50p for under two hours and £1 for any longer stays. Parking would be free between 6pm and 8am.
- 2.7 A group of local residents who are involved in the preparation of a Topsham Community Plan have submitted a report which proposes a range of measures to improve parking control and availability though it is silent on the specific issue of Holman Way car park expansion. It is known however that some of those involved in this work certainly oppose the expansion. Recommendations by that study are as follows, with my comments annotated:
 - **Make Fore Street a ‘Pay and Display’ zone between 9am and 5.30pm to increase the turnover of cars and encourage visitors** – this seems a sensible proposal but it is obviously something that Devon County Council, as Highway Authority, will need to consider.
 - **Introduction of dual use resident parking areas in Holman Way car park and Parkfield Way.** Reluctant to do this for the former. The latter is for Devon County Council to consider.
 - **High profile Traffic Wardens in Fore Street** – this would be likely to follow if Pay and Display were introduced.
 - **Reduce the maximum stay at the Quay and at Matthews Hall car park to 2 hours** – Matthews Hall is a central car park and a reduction to 2 hours would be appropriate. Such a limit is considered inappropriate at the Quay given its location outside the centre.
 - **“Police” free car parks and discourage long term parking** – free car parks are virtually impossible to police economically.

- **Make Holman Way and Tappers Close car parks “Pay and Display” with dedicated zones for resident permit holders** – charging for Holman Way does appear to be sensible but as with the previous review of parking for residents, there should be no provision for permit holders in off-street car parks. A nominal charge could be made for Tappers Close.
- **Enforce current regulations at Holman Way car park** – see above.
- **Review car parking restrictions in Ferry Road** – this is for Devon County Council.
- **Car park charges should not be cheaper than local public transport fares** – this is unrealistic for a small town.
- **Charges at key car parks should not be lower than those at Matthews Hall** – this is not supported as Matthews Hall is more central.
- **Improved information for visitors on the location of parking** – highway signage should be checked by Devon County Council.

3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 If Members decide to proceed, budgetary provision would need to be made in the 2006/7 Budget.
- 3.2 This is a difficult issue to weigh up with the loss of this landscaping belt and biodiversity corridor set against the benefits of additional off-street parking in an area which is very much lacking in such provision. It will be difficult for proposals for an extended/redesigned car park involving the loss of the tree belt to meet the statutory duty to preserve or enhance the conservation area. It would also appear to be inconsistent with other policies on protection of wildlife sites and residential amenity.
- 3.3 If Members wish to proceed with an extension of the car park, a planning application will be necessary and a more detailed costed scheme would be prepared for further consideration by Members. In the event that the extension does not proceed, the trees themselves should be block felled, given their condition. (The Head of Planning Services would issue an approval for the previously submitted felling notification). The under storey would then develop and some supplementary planting would be desirable.

4 RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 Members are asked to consider whether they wish to proceed with this proposal as outlined in section 2.

JOHN RIGBY
DIRECTOR ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT

ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report:-
 Parking in Topsham: A Survey.