

HENLEY & BEAUDESERT JOINT PARISH COUNCIL THE TOWN'S THREE PUBLIC CAR PARKS

THE CHAIR OF THE JPC INTRODUCED HIMSELF AND SAID THAT NUMEROUS COMMUNICATIONS, BOTH VERBALLY AND BY EMAIL, HAD BEEN RECEIVED FROM PARISIONERS WHO ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE ONGOING CAR PARKING ISSUES IN HENLEY. HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT THE JPC HAD TAKEN THE UNPRECEDENTED DECISION TO CANCEL THE SCHEDULED MEETINGS THIS EVENING SO THAT A DEDICATED MEETING CAN BE HELD FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC TO AIR THEIR CONCERNS AND TO ASK QUESTIONS.

The Chair introduced Matt Jennings, the SDC District Cllr, who said that he had been approached by several Parishioners who had concerns regarding the Car Parking in Henley. Matt went on to say that he could only give information about the Prince Harry Road Car Park, which was under the control of SDC. Matt said that he had been asked several questions, so he would say what the questions were and answer them:

What is the background to the take-over of Prince Harry Carpark?

SDC were approached by the Henley and Beaudesert joint Parish Council (JPC) to take over the Prince Harry road Car Park from SDC.

Who instigated it?

The transfer request was instigated by the JPC

Are they buying or renting the car park?

This would be on a 99-year lease for a peppercorn rent of £1 p/a.

What responsibilities would the JPC have for the car park?

All standard responsibilities as a tenant including Peppercorn rent, provide 6 allocated spaces for the medical centre, security, all maintenance costs, suitable insurance and business rates.

Are there any plans for more Double Yellow lines in Henley ?

I have been advised by Warwickshire County Council that, due to the current load on their work program, any 'request' is unlikely to be considered until April 2020 and then a consultation period may begin.

Has a lease been signed?

I do not believe a lease has been signed yet.

What happens if the JPC do not sign the Lease?

SDC have no current plans to charge in District car parks outside of Stratford so it would remain free and there would be no changes to the current arrangements.

Matt said that his personal view, as someone who lives in Henley, was that charging for car parking will be detrimental. He thought it would push traffic out of the car parks and onto the adjoining roads where they can legitimately park for free. This would create access problems for utility vehicles such as refuse collection but, even more seriously, for emergency vehicles such as fire engines. A taster of this will be visible when the effects of the Railway station charging policy kick in on Station Road and Brook End Drive. From a commercial perspective I have spoken to several shops in Henley and I am yet to come

across one that thinks charging for parking is going to have a positive effect on their business.

Matt advised that the JPC would be responsible for maintenance of the Car Parks if they were to take them over and business rates would be charged on both Prince Harry Road and The Croft Car Parks at £5,500 and £2,177 pa respectively.

A Parishioner asked whether minutes of the meeting would be available, and the Chair confirmed that the Clerk would be writing up a report of the meeting which would be uploaded on to the web site.

A Parishioner said that she had read the Reports from the JPC over the last two years and thought that it was a 'done deal'. Cllr Jackson, who had been involved in the process for four years, confirmed that the JPC had resolved to proceed with the adoption of the two main Car Parks in Henley; Prince Harry Road, & The Croft. She went on to say that the owners of The Croft Car Park, Taylor Wimpey (TW), saw the Car Park as a liability. Cllr Jackson was asked if there was a time frame for completion and she responded by saying that the JPC's Solicitors, Thomas Guise, could in theory complete the paperwork next week if all parties agreed.

A Parishioner asked how long the JPC had before Taylor Wimpey acted because he understood the pressure from TW was increasing as the situation had taken so long to reach a resolution. He went on to say that he understood that TW had a third party who would be willing to take over The Croft. Cllr Jackson said that there was a realistic chance if the JPC took the Car Parks over that they would make a profit, which could be re-invested into the community in Henley. She went on to say that LPS would be managing all the Car Parks so the JPC would receive a regular income, based on the parking fees and penalty notices charged. However, the JPC would not be tied to LPS forever and that there was a break clause after three years and if LPS breached the lease, the agreements could be terminated earlier. Cllr Jackson said that there was no Town like Henley, so it was difficult to make a direct comparison.

A Parishioner asked if any research had been done on who uses the Car Parks and Cllr Jackson advised that Sue Osborne had carried out a survey on behalf of the JPC about users of The Croft and Prince Harry Road Car Parks. Mrs Osborne had reported that quite a few residents parked all day and overnight in the Car Parks.

Cllr Jennings asked if the JPC had any projections of income and Cllr Jackson responded by saying that it was difficult to project any income at this moment in time.

A Parishioner said that a Petition had been conducted on behalf of the businesses in Henley and over 80% were against Car Parking charges. The Chair of the JPC advised that the JPC were engaging with local businesses and had attended an inaugural meeting recently with over twenty-five representatives from local businesses who had been present.

A Parishioner asked what arrangements the JPC had made to respond to the possibility of the provision of permits for The Croft Car Park and whether they had any flexible thinking. The Chair responded and said that The Croft could go to a third party and if that were the case, the JPC would have no input or control over any charges or permits. He went on to say that the JPC would be working in unison with LPS and permits would be available for those residents who needed them and were eligible. Cllr Jackson said that the JPC would be working closely with LPS in order to make it work and the JPC was listening to everyone's views, however, there would be a transitional period whilst the new charges settled in. The Parishioner went on to ask how long the JPC would take to respond to a genuine need for a parking permit. The Clerk said that generally speaking, if a Parishioner telephoned, she could respond immediately. If a Parishioner emailed her, she would respond as soon as she was able to and usually within twenty-four hours, during the working week.

A Parishioner said that Local Councils do not have many powers, but this was a golden opportunity for the JPC to influence how the Car Parks in Henley are managed and run.

The Chair of the JPC said that he did not want to go back in history and if the JPC were not to proceed with the purchase of The Croft, TW would sell the Car Park to a third party. He went on to say that Cllrs and residents were passionate about the Car Park situation and it may or may not have been handled better but it was a complicated matter and if the JPC were to start again, TW would certainly offer The Croft to an entrepreneur. Cllr Hubbocks said that TW always wanted to get rid of the Car Park and offered it to previous JPC's at a nominal sum. Cllr Hubbocks went on to say that he felt that the Prince Harry Road Car Park had not been investigated properly.

A Parishioner said that she had heard there were six spaces available in the Prince Harry Road Car Park for residents visiting the Doctors Surgery and asked if that would be enough. Cllr Jackson advised that LPS will be installing a tablet in the Doctors Surgery so that Users could register the registration number of their car if you were not able to use one of the six allocated car parking spaces.

A Parishioner asked whether the JPC could take over The Croft with or without LPS being involved and whether funds could be raised from increasing the Precept. The Chair said that this would be an option. He felt that between £7,000 - £10,000 could be raised from increasing the precept but this figure would not recover the costs of maintenance and insurances. He went on to say that someone had to run the Car Parks on behalf of the JPC. Cllr Jackson said that the costs would be broadly £10,000 per Car Park.

The former Chair of the JPC advised that businesses would benefit, and the business rates go elsewhere and not into Henley. He said that £20-30,000 would need to be raised through the precept and that every household would have to pay if the precept increased, whether they used the Car Parks or not.

A Parishioner said that they felt that there would be an impact on on-street parking as the Railway Station had started charging for parking.

A Parishioner said that adopting the Car Parks and having a long-term plan and getting double yellow lines installed was logical. Cllr Jackson said that the JPC was engaging with WCC regarding the possible installation of double yellow lines.

John Horner, the WCC County Cllr responded and said that there were a lot of considerations to take into account prior to double yellow lines being installed, not least was a six-week public consultation period. He went on to say that robust evidence was required prior to the installation of any traffic calming methods. He went on to say that WCC was aware that the JPC were in the process of taking over the Car Parks and would install double yellow lines if there was a proven need.

A Parishioner asked whether a permit covering all areas of Henley could be considered and whether there could be a dual scheme. District Cllr Jennings said that in the current survey being conducted by WCC that they were considering making High Street car parking permits available to local businesses.

A Parishioner said if the JPC decided to take over the Car Parks, they could take the costs out of their reserves.

A Parishioner said that if the precept were increased to cover the costs of operating the Car Parks, many elderly people in Henley would not be able to afford it. A Parishioner asked whether the JPC could ask SDC for a reduction in the business rates for the Car Parks and the businesses who benefit could give a percentage towards the Car Parks. Cllrs responded by saying that the JPC had no powers to do that and the businesses were under increasing pressure as it is. A Parishioner said that without the businesses in Henley, it would affect all the residents in the Town.

A Parishioner who lives in Brook End Drive said that it was becoming increasingly dangerous with many cars parking along Station Road.

The Chair asked if everyone agreed that the JPC adopt The Croft Car Park to stem any interest from a third party. Cllr Jackson said that if LPS were told that the JPC wished to withdraw, the commercial revenue expected would drop significantly and it would restrict the JPC supporting social organisations in Henley. A Parishioner asked how far the JPC's reserves would go because if there was a bad Winter, it would erode the surfaces of the Car Parks, which would then need to be replaced.

A Parishioner said that the JPC had been discussing the Car Parks for four years and there was enough evidence available so the JPC needed to decide in writing. He went on to question whether a Working Party can make decisions on behalf of the JPC. The former Chair of the JPC said that only the whole Council can make decisions and not a Working Party. He went on to say that the Working Party and the JPC only had the best interests of Henley in mind.

The Chair said that he would ensure that the JPC was transparent and there would be a comment box on the JPC web site for parishioners to comment if they so wished. He went on to say that the JPC would make a decision at their next meeting later in the month, but they cannot do everything overnight. Once

the decision is made it should be accepted and everything would be uploaded on to the JPC web site. A Parishioner thanked the Chair for conducting the meeting. Cllr Field said that the business model adopted needed to be robust and financially viable.

The Chair went on to say that a lot of residents were concerned about the illegal parking of cars outside the Co-Op and One Stop and when he had challenged someone for parking there, he had received a lot of abuse.

The Chair said that one option would be to install barriers and he had asked a leading manufacturer of kerbside barriers to provide estimates of cost, drawings and photos of railings which are not incongruous and have the facility of a manual lockable push to slide sections giving access for off-loading. The parking strip should also be provided with two front nearside disabled bays at the south end, thus pushing offenders into the 'cage' forcing them to walk along the offside of their vehicle. The rest of the strip will be a good stretch of kerbside for delivery vehicles, even when the disabled bays are in use.

Cllr Horner said that installing traffic calming methods was extremely expensive and the installation of traffic lights was around £100,000 and statistically it does not seem to make much difference. He went on to say that if speed humps were introduced, they made a lot of noise and again statistically, they do not seem to make much difference.

Cllr Horner advised that Average Speed Cameras are effective and suggested that the JPC lobby the Police & Crime Commissioner and invite him to a JPC meeting. He went on to say that Warwickshire seemed to be the only County that did not have Average Speed Cameras. He advised that Hockley Heath had Average Speed Cameras installed and the five-year project cost in the region of £24,000 pa. The Chair of the JPC said that the JPC were engaging with WCC, the Police and the PCC currently.

A Parishioner, who was a Traffic Police Sergeant said that she had attended thousands of accidents with many fatalities and they all had a ripple effect on communities. She said that in her experience, residents get annoyed at traffic calming & double yellow lines. She said that the best approach may be to target the people who are speeding at the time of day they speed and park outside the Co-Op and One Stop. She asked if a Speed Survey had been carried out by the JPC. Cllrs confirmed that a Survey had been conducted but the results had revealed that there were not many incidences of speeding. She went on to say that people's perception of speeding was not always correct, and many people did not speed. She advised that the Police have a web site where you can log and report an incident of illegal parking/dangerous driving.

A former Chair of the JPC said that there was something that we could all do to reduce the incidences of illegal parking and speeding and that is for residents to be encouraged to drive at 20 mph down the High Street voluntarily.

The Chair asked those present at the meeting to see if they could think of anything that might help with the issues that had been discussed and encouraged people to post comments on the JPC web site. He went on to say

that if barriers were installed outside the Co-Op and One Stop, it would also safeguard little people in the community.

Cllr Hubbocks made the point that there used to be a sign outside the Co-Op and One Stop saying that you could only park for ten minutes whilst loading or unloading. He asked Cllr Horner to investigate whether a similar sign could be re-instated.

The Chair of the JPC thanked everyone for attending the meeting and their very valuable input.