

**AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE WAS HELD ON 10 OCTOBER 2007**

Councillors Carr (P), Davis, Dickson (P), Foster, Foster-Reed, Jacobs (P), Kimber (P), Philpott (P), Mrs Salter (P), Mrs Searle (P) Train (P) and Ward (P).

It was reported that Councillors Mrs Cully and Allen had been nominated to replace Councillors Davis and Foster respectively for this meeting.

Before the meeting commenced, a minutes silence was observed in memory of Ron Wilson, a former officer of the Council, who had died the previous day.

33. APOLOGIES

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Davis, Foster and Foster-Reed.

34. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

35. DISPARITY IN SHORT-STAY CAR PARKING CHARGES AT LEE-ON-THE-SOLENT IN COMPARISON WITH THE REST OF THE BOROUGH

The Chairman welcomed Mrs Liz Driver (petition organiser), Mr Richard Mackay (Lee-on-the-Solent Residents Association), Mr Peter Patterson (Lee-on-the-Solent traders Association), Councillor Cully (Leader of the Council) and Councillor Carter (Councillor for Lee West), who had been invited to the meeting to make observations and answer questions to assist the Committee in its scrutiny of this area of work.

The Chairman briefly reminded Members that it had been agreed at the meeting on 7 June 2007 that this subject be scrutinised at a future whole meeting of the Committee.

A number of questions were raised by Members to the invitees and the following responses made.

Councillor Cully advised that he was unaware of the thinking behind the proposal at Council to introduce two hours free short-stay car parking in the Town but not at Lee-on-the-Solent. He had recognised this disparity when it was raised by the Conservative Group. He felt there was a case for giving parity to short-stay parking in Lee-on-the-Solent but consideration would also have to be given to bringing long-stay charging in line with that at the Town Centre i.e. that charging should begin at 8.00 a.m. as opposed to 10.00 a.m.

Councillor Cully said that he had voted for the introduction of long-stay car parking charges at Lee-on-the-Solent beginning at 10.00 a.m. but there had been no free short-stay car parking at that time. He had not considered making changes to car parking charges during the February 2007 budget process. The Labour Group had only taken over Leadership of the Council in December 2006; there was a limited period in which to work on the budget and there had been other priorities. He had no objection to the proposal to scrutinise car parking charges and would like a review to take place. Following this, any judgement should be based on the evidence of the review and in the best interests of Gosport.

Officers advised that, should Lee-on-the-Solent short-stay car parking charges be given parity with those in the rest of the Borough, it was estimated that £50,000 in revenue would be lost on an annual basis.

Mr Mackay told the Committee that, should car parking charges at Lee-on-the-Solent receive parity, including long-stay charges beginning at 8.00 a.m. he felt there would be a much more contented feeling in the area. Elmore was a seafront car park and, if it were treated differently to Stokes Bay, there could be problems.

Mr Patterson advised that most traders operated from 8.30a.m. until 5.30 p.m. Generally, Lee Traders Association were in favour of car parking charges provided they were fair and reasonable. Free car parking in the short –stay car parks would probably suit some people but principally they were looking for parity with the Town Centre.

Mrs Driver advised that approximately 2,500 people had signed the petition to introduce parity with a further 150 signing that day. A further petition had been signed by 72 business representatives. She felt people would be happy with charging at long-stay car parks beginning at 8.00 a.m. and would like to see two hours free short-term parking.

Since the introduction of car parking charges, businesses had suffered. A large number of people had lost trade and 10 or 11 businesses had disappeared. There was a need to encourage people, even Lee residents, into Lee-on-the-Solent shopping area again.

Mr Patterson advised that car parking charges were an element contributing to the downturn of business in Lee-on-the-Solent. There were, however, more important issues to consider in order to bring businesses back to the area. Invitations had been extended to people to attend meetings of the Lee Traders Association to discuss car parking charges but the invitations had not been accepted.

Councillor Carter advised that residents were mainly concerned about the lack of parity with the rest of the Borough. The High Street had numerous cars parked on it and not many people were asking for free car parking, only parity.

Mrs Driver advised that the petition she organised started due to the introduction of free short-stay car parking in the Town Centre. Some concern was expressed by Members that a number of the signatories appeared to have addresses outside the area. Mrs Driver confirmed that they were visitors.

In response to the suggestion that there had been an increase in the use of car parks at Lee-on-the-Solent since the introduction of free parking in the Town Centre, Mrs Driver agreed that the weather may have been a factor as it was a seaside area. She stressed that people who did not live within walking distance of Lee-on-the-Solent no longer came to the area, preferring instead to go to Stubbington where the parking was free for one hour.

Mrs Driver agreed there were opportunities for people to park in Lee High Street, an opportunity not available in Gosport, but works carried out by Hampshire County Council did not help the situation.

Mr Patterson advised that these were safety road works which were of great importance.

Mr Mackay advised that, since the building of Cherque Farm, there had been an increase in the number of young visitors to the High Street. However, the estate was somewhat cut off from the centre of Lee. Many people living at Cherque Farm drove elsewhere to work and would do their shopping close to their workplace. A number of supermarkets in Gosport had their own car parking facility but this was not the case with the Co-op at Lee.

Mrs Driver said that, if car parking charge parity were given, there would be an improvement in trade provided the new arrangement was properly publicised.

Mr Patterson said that business was encouraging at the moment. A hard core of people shopped at Lee and he did not envisage any significant increase in trade should parity be given. He did, however, accept that his business was of a different nature to that of Mrs Driver; Mrs Driver's being service provision and his being retail.

Mr Mackay suggested the difference would be marginal. People were in the habit of shopping elsewhere. Most people considered the car parking charges to be unfair but not wrong.

Councillor Cully said he felt there should be parity for all car parks in the Borough. The proposer of free car parking in the Town Centre had invited the Conservative Group to put forward an amendment to include Lee short-stay car parks but this had not happened. He would have supported such an amendment but stressed that he considered it the responsibility of the Lee Councillors to put such a motion or amendment forward.

Councillor Cully said he would await the Committee's findings. If he felt that two hours free parking in Lee short-stay car parks was justified he would not be opposed to it but would wish long-stay charges to begin at 8.00 a.m.

In response to a question from a Member, Mr Mackay said that he did not blame any Councillor for the lack of parity but was unhappy that the matter had been under debate for so long.

Mr Patterson said he did not blame any one group. It was a matter of how important the funds were to the Council's finances.

Mrs Driver said that car parking charges had been introduced by the Conservative Group. The Lee Councillors should have done their best to bring parity to Lee but she felt they had not.

Councillor Cully said that he would be happy with the re-introduction of free car parking for two hours at Jamaica Place as with all other short-stay car parks. However, such a decision would have to be based on evidence.

The Chairman thanked the invitees for attending the meeting and for their contributions. At this point the invitees left the meeting.

Having listened to the views of the attendees, Members debated the way forward and the following views were expressed:

- there was a general consensus that parity was desired and would be fair
- free short-stay car parking in Lee-on-the-Solent would be at a cost of approximately £50,000 a year to the Borough
- should this be introduced, charges for long-stay car parks at Lee should start at 8.00 a.m. and not, as was the current arrangement, at 10.00 a.m.
- the invitees representing Lee-on-the-Solent felt the current charging arrangements to be unfair and none had appeared to object to the concept of parity in both short and long stay car parks
- should parity be introduced, it would be necessary to consider the impact on other services
- there was enough information available over the last two years regarding, for example, foot fall information and the impact on trade, to make a considered judgement
- an evidence based report should be brought to an extraordinary meeting of the Committee in four to six weeks time to consider a full scrutiny of car parking charges within the Borough

Members accordingly supported the last view and decided that a report should be presented to the Committee at a future meeting to enable a full scrutiny of car parking charges in the Borough to be carried out.

RESOLVED: That an evidence based report be brought to an extraordinary meeting of the Committee in four to six weeks time to consider a full scrutiny of car parking charges within the Borough.

36. CONSIDERATION OF REQUEST FOR SCRUTINY DEFERRED FROM THE 27 SEPTEMBER 2007 MEETING

Members considered a request for scrutiny submitted by Councillor Wright, the Chairman of the Community and Environment Board, regarding the issuing of free parking permits to various organisations.

RESOLVED: That:

- a) the issue be scrutinised; and
- b) the scrutiny be carried out as part of the full scrutiny of car parking charges in the Borough.

37. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no further business to discuss.

The meeting ended at 8.10 p.m.

CHAIRMAN