

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET – 5 NOVEMBER 2009

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL SERVICES

PARKING STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet endorsement for the development of a Wirral Traffic Model and Birkenhead Town Centre Transport Strategy that will enable a Wirral Parking Strategy to be developed.
- 1.2 The report provides an overview of key issues to be considered in the development of a Wirral Parking Strategy and invites Cabinet to advise of any additional points it wishes to see being considered.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The parking strategy contained in the first Merseyside Local Transport Plan (LTP), submitted to the Government in 2000, stated that there would be no overall increase in the number of car parking spaces beyond [the then] current levels in the main centres [including Birkenhead], except to meet the minimum operational needs for major new city and town centre developments. Charging policies actively discouraged long-stay parking at the main centres, by progressively seeking to increase the cost of long-stay parking, to encourage commuters to use alternative, sustainable modes of transport and help combat increasing traffic congestion. In contrast, the level of short-stay parking charges in the main centres were not to disadvantage shoppers and visitors. In addition, a common pricing structure with private sector car park operators was encouraged to maximise the effectiveness of the parking strategy. Such principles continued into the second LTP, which runs up to 2010/11.
- 2.2 Over several years, any planning applications for new operated car parks and/or developments have been considered by officers as part of the planning process based on the LTP parking strategy and any other appropriate parking policies, including regional standards. Despite this, there have been occasions where a specific parking strategy would have assisted officers in the planning recommendation process.
- 2.3 In addition, there is growing concern about the role that current parking levels and controls are having on the economic viability of some of the borough's district centres and on decisions by potential developers considering investment in Wirral.

3.0 OVERVIEW OF KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 In order to develop a parking strategy for Wirral, it will be crucial to ensure that it is 'fit for purpose' and based on robust data and evidence of future need.

- 3.2 A parking strategy needs to reflect the needs of a particular area whilst also complementing key policies that form part of the Council's regeneration, economic and transport strategies. This, perhaps, is most relevant to Birkenhead, in order to complement the Birkenhead and Wirral Waters Integrated Regeneration Study (described further in Section 4). To this end, it is proposed that the parking strategy also forms part of a Birkenhead Town Centre Transport Strategy (also described in Section 4), which will form a framework for future discussions with developers and for transport provision, and be used in determining future planning applications.
- 3.3 Birkenhead is Wirral's main retail and commercial centre, and is included in the Merseyside LTP as one of the key sub-regional centres, within which parking strategy plays a crucial role in supporting the centre's competitiveness, transport strategy and accessibility. However, parking plays a crucial role in supporting other district centres where there may be concerns about the level of parking supply and/or the level of charges that control the use of valuable off-road parking space.
- 3.4 Regeneration proposals can also be affected by concerns about inadequate car parking. Strategically, the transport objective to increase modal shift from the private car to more sustainable modes of transport (bus, train, cycling and walking) should be driving a move towards stricter controls and/or the reduction of the levels of parking provision in centres, especially where there are good levels of public transport. However, the reality is that a significant proportion of the public do not see public transport as being a viable option. With limited subsidised public transport services and reducing levels of funding for such provision, privately operated bus services in particular can be subject to changes that do not encourage the car-driving proportion of the public to feel able to use public transport as their main mode of transport.
- 3.5 Other issues that should be supporting a reduction in car use, and hence parking restrictions, include the aims to reduce congestion and improve the environment, including the reduction of carbon emissions, which can often be in conflict with regeneration proposals and car parking availability/parking controls. Whilst not proven to cause asthma, it is acknowledged that air pollution can affect those people with respiratory problems. The health sector also recognises the benefits to be gained from increased walking and cycling as part of a person's travel arrangements.
- 3.6 An initiative where some modal shift is being seen relates to the school run. Schools that have adopted and continue to develop their travel plan have demonstrated that car use can be reduced, however, parking along school frontages continues to be a problem in some locations during school start and finish times.
- 3.7 A challenge for a future parking strategy will be to what level the above issues might be best addressed and balanced, whilst reflecting other strategy commitments and management of the limited availability of car parking provision.
- 3.8 Members should note that the Parking Strategy is not intended to relate to residential parking provision. Whilst parking associated with residential

development is important, such provision is considered as part of the planning process and in accordance with Supplementary Planning Document SPD4.

4.0 BIRKENHEAD TRANSPORT PLANNING

- 4.1 Members will note from the above sections that, in order to develop a robust parking strategy, it is necessary to consider many issues. However, this section focuses on Birkenhead, which is a key centre for economic regeneration, and describes the work being carried out to steer future transport planning.
- 4.2 As previously stated, it is necessary to consider the aims and objectives for Wirral's main retail and business centre so that any parking strategy is able to assist delivery of these aims and objectives. It is also important to consider development proposals outside, but in the vicinity of, the town centre in order to get a complete picture of what future parking demand is likely to be and to understand the impact of parking strategy on the economic well-being of the town centre.
- 4.3 Over a number of years, Birkenhead Town Centre has been going through a gradual transformation, and work continues to further improve accessibility to this main retail and commercial centre. Improvements in transport accessibility have to be considered in the context of a changing role for Birkenhead, which has seen its attractiveness as a retail centre fall rapidly – in April 2008 Birkenhead's share of Wirral comparison goods shopping was 28.4%, whilst in March 2009, this had fallen to 23.3% (-5.1%, the largest fall in Wirral). In comparison, Croft Retail and Leisure Park saw its comparison goods share increase from 13.6% to 14.4% (+0.8%, the largest increase in Wirral). From a national retail ranking of 98th in 2004, Birkenhead has now fallen to 124th. This is in stark contrast with the position of Wigan town centre, which serves a similar size catchment but has risen 51 places over the same period.
- 4.4 It is recognised that the majority of shoppers in Birkenhead arrive by public transport or by non-car means but any review of parking strategy must consider how the current strategy influences shoppers' behaviour.
- 4.5 Past key transport-related projects have included a new rail station at Conway Park, improvements to the Birkenhead Bus Station, the introduction of decriminalised parking enforcement and on-street parking controls. In addition, there have been local safety and traffic management schemes, which have generally reacted to the need to improve conditions for current road users.
- 4.6 However, in order to ensure that the transport network, including parking supply, supports the retention and growth of the Town Centre, and supports other regeneration projects such as Wirral Waters, Oliver Street, Hind Street and Cammell Lairds, it is necessary to determine what future transport projects will be needed and how the parking strategy can support economic development. To determine such, it is crucial to assess how much, and where, the *cumulative* effect of traffic growth is likely occur as developments take place and as the local economy improves.
- 4.7 To this end, at a sub-regional level, the LTP Partners are working on the development of a Liverpool City Region Transport Model (LCRTM). The LCRTM will help inform the development of LTP3 (from 2011/12) and assist

Partners identify what transport policies and interventions will be most effective in managing future traffic growth. This model is expected to be ready to start testing policies and interventions in late Autumn this year.

- 4.8 At a Wirral level, arrangements are also underway to develop a computer model of the highway network in and around Birkenhead, including the Wirral Waters area, to assess the impacts of predicted traffic levels on local junctions and identify any necessary improvements. The Wirral transport model will 'sit below' and use the same database and trip matrices of the more strategic Liverpool City Region Transport Model, ensuring compatibility of data and outputs, which will be important if the models are to be used in the future to justify any major scheme expenditure. The local model is anticipated to be built and ready to start using by Summer 2010.
- 4.9 Another important piece of work which will be relevant to a future parking strategy will be the outcome of a study being led by the Regeneration Department in partnership with Corporate Services Department and key stakeholders. The Birkenhead and Wirral Waters Integrated Regeneration Study (IRS) aims to create an integrated single vision and 'story for renewal' for the wider Birkenhead area and seeks to set out a comprehensive direction for regeneration and place-making in the area. It will include consideration of a wide range of issues, principally economic regeneration, employment, retail, housing, HMRI, transport, planning and environmental sustainability. Completion of the IRS is expected to be at the beginning of 2010.
- 4.10 As a reflection of the importance of transport to Wirral's future economic regeneration, officers from Technical Services sit on the IRS Board and IRS Steering Group, as well as the Wirral Waters Transport Steering Group and Liverpool City Region Transport Model Steering Group.
- 4.11 In addition, colleagues in Corporate Services are progressing the forthcoming Core Strategy that will form part of the Local Development Framework (LDF) for Wirral, the project plan of which was last reported to Cabinet on 23 July 2009 (minute 63 refers). The Core Strategy will provide a framework for a future supplementary planning document on transport and accessibility.
- 4.12 Members will be aware that Council operated car parks in Birkenhead and most other centres are operated by Pay and Display controls. Tariffs are generally constructed to reflect the LTP parking strategy as described in Section 2. Whilst Birkenhead Town Centre has the more demanding parking controls, it should be remembered that, strategically, Birkenhead has good access by public transport, both bus and rail. Therefore, from a transportation perspective such a location would be seen as being more appropriate for more robust demand management measures. Any future parking strategy will, therefore, also need to consider provision of all available transport facilities, in addition to the impact of strategy on the wider economy of the town centre.
- 4.13 It is proposed that the results from both the Birkenhead IRS and the Wirral traffic model will inform the development of a Birkenhead Town Centre Transport Strategy (BTCTS), which will aim to provide an efficient, sustainable transport system that facilitates effective movement of people and goods, whilst supporting economic regeneration. The town centre transport strategy should ensure that adequate access is provided to those wishing to visit, shop or work

in the area. It will identify where prioritisation might be given to pedestrians, cyclists and/or public transport, and where motorised vehicles might be prohibited. Consideration will also be given to taxis, coaches, motorcycles and delivery vehicles.

4.14 The BTCTS will be the framework within which a parking strategy for Birkenhead would most suitably sit. The model will test different transport and development options, and report how associated traffic growth is anticipated to affect the existing highway network. Model results will inform decisions as to where parking would be best placed and when existing junctions will become over-loaded etc, so assisting future funding programmes.

4.15 In recognition of the importance of this work, a bid for funding from the Council's 2010/11 capital programme to contribute to the traffic model and development of a town centre transport and parking strategy is currently being considered.

5.0 PARKING STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

5.1 The following bullet points set out various tasks that will need to be carried out as part of the development of a parking strategy.

- Assess current parking in Birkenhead Town Centre and other district centres and examine how the spaces are used, i.e. by retailers, season tickets, short or long terms stay; public/private; private non-residential parking (PRN).
- Review and evaluate the impact of existing parking areas and zones, parking controls and tariffs, particularly on existing businesses, both retail and commercial.
- Establish how the current parking strategy influences the behaviours of shoppers, commuters and other visitors to the centres.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of current parking provision and control measures in terms of meeting the aims and objectives of the LTP.

5.2 The parking strategy should:

- Be a complementary element of a Birkenhead Town Centre Transport Strategy, within the context of regional parking strategy and as informed by the Birkenhead and Wirral Waters Integrated Regeneration Study and consultation with stakeholders.
- Support the aims to increase modal shift away from the private car and reduce congestion and carbon emissions.
- Limit the number of off-street publicly available car parking spaces to a number required to support future regeneration proposals.
- Minimise the proportion of commuter parking in off-street car parks.
- Provide adequate car parking facilities for the mobility impaired at key locations throughout the town/district centres.
- Provide adequate bicycle and powered-two-wheeler parking throughout the town centres.
- Identify appropriate parking tariff structures to support future town/district centre plans and sustain business investment, whilst reflecting the need for effective demand management.
- Designate an 'outer-control zone' in Birkenhead where parking controls may need to be introduced and/or tightened in the future.

- Engage with traders, businesses and private operators of off-street car parks to create a partnership to take forward the strategy.

5.3 Additional considerations regarding the parking strategy development would be welcome from Cabinet.

6.0 FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 Funding has been secured for the development of the Wirral traffic model from the 2009/10 New Growth Point (NGP) allocation (Cabinet 25th June 2009, minute 39 refers). No NGP funding is currently identified for transport projects in 2010/11. In addition, there is some funding within the approved transportation block of Wirral's 2009/10 LTP programme to support Birkenhead Town Centre, which is to be directed to this project. There is also a sum of money held by the LTP Support Unit to fund surveys that will support both the LCRTM and Wirral model. However, there is a £98,000 shortfall in funding to carry out the complete project, for which a bid from the Council's 2010/11 capital programme is currently being considered.

6.2 There will be maintenance costs should a future decision be taken to maintain the Wirral traffic model as a working tool. The main outlay is likely to be for new survey data to ensure that the model is based on relevant and up to date data. The Department for Transport deem data that is over 5-years old to be less robust, therefore, appropriate funding for new survey data will need to be considered as part of future budgets. Opportunities should also be maximised to engage developers in the use of the model, for which funding contributions could be sought.

6.3 Current parking charges provide a revenue income to the Council and variation of these charges would result in financial implications which will be reported to Members dependent upon the options prepared for parking strategy.

7.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no additional staffing implications arising directly from this report. Existing officers will work with the appointed framework consultant(s) in the development of the transport model and transport/parking strategies.

8.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no specific implications under this heading.

9.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no specific implications under this heading.

10.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The reduction of reliance on the private car and the promotion of public transport, walking and cycling promote sustainable development and healthy lifestyles.

11.0 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Parking Strategy is an important tool in encouraging sustainable development. Maximum regional parking standards are contained in the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) at Policy RT2. Para 8.7 of the RSS states that parking charges, enforcement and provision are all key elements of an effective strategy to manage the demand for travel by car as the availability and cost of parking is potentially a major influence on travel decisions and can promote more sustainable transport choices. To maximise effectiveness, parking policies and provision should complement wider land-use and accessibility plans and strategies.
- 11.2 The wider land-use implications include the Council's duty, under the Local Government Act 2000 (and Sustainable Communities Act 2007) to promote economic 'well-being'. The RSS includes the economic objective of promoting strong and viable centres, as locations for the concentration of retail, office and recreational development. The economic objectives are founded on the economic programme put forward in the Regional Economic Strategy to strengthen and regenerate the regional economy and address problems of worklessness.

12.0 ANTI-POVERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 There are no specific implications under this heading.

13.0 SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 There are no specific implications under this heading.

14.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 Whilst Birkenhead is the focus for the future development of a parking strategy, this report will be of interest to Members of all Wards.

15.0 ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT

- 15.1 The following background papers have been used in the preparation of this report:
- North West of England Plan Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021, GONW, September 2008
 - Power to promote well-being of the area: Statutory guidance for local councils, CLG, February 2009
 - Strong and Prosperous Communities, Local Government White Paper, CLG, 2006

16.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 16.1 Cabinet is requested to:-
- (i) Endorse the development of the Wirral Traffic Model and Birkenhead Town Centre Transport Strategy as described in Section 4.0;

- (ii) Endorse the development of a Wirral Parking Strategy, to complement the Council's Integrated Regeneration Strategy and other corporate priorities, based on the principles in Section 5.0;
- (iii) Note the key issues in the report and advise of any additional points to be considered as part of the development of the Wirral Parking Strategy.

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