

BLACKWOOD TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT GROUP – 27TH JULY 2006

SUBJECT: OFF STREET CAR PARKING PROVISION IN BLACKWOOD

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF THE ENVIRONMENT

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To respond to the request from the Blackwood Traders association to implement free car parking in the High Street and Bus Station Council controlled car parks in Blackwood until December 2006 when bus services move from High Street and back in to the bus station.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 No clear evidence has been presented to demonstrate that availability of parking for shoppers and the ongoing works to the bus station have been detrimental to trade in Blackwood in recent months. Anecdotal evidence has been received that trade on the High Street has improved. Also, car park usage and income has remained stable in Blackwood. Therefore careful consideration is required over the risk of introducing a principle of allowing free off-street car parking during Council promoted improvement works.
- 2.2 As part of the major investment to provide a new bus station in Blackwood, a publicity campaign has been implemented to promote trade in the town during the course of the ongoing works for the bus station ('Blackwood defining the future').
- 2.3 The following options have been considered to determine if they could meet the Blackwood Traders association's request:
1. Free parking in the Council's High Street and Bus Station car parks with no enforcement.
 2. Free/reduced cost parking in the Council's High Street and Bus Station car parks with the current time restrictions applied and enforced.
 3. Free parking in the Council's High Street and Bus Station car parks with new time restrictions applied and enforced.
- 2.4 Option 1 is considered inappropriate because it would not enable the Council to control the use of the car parks and safeguard provision for shoppers and visitors. Commuters would be allowed to park wherever they wish all day at the expense of provision for shoppers and visitors. Option 3 is considered unfeasible because it would take at least three months to implement and would offer no benefit within the timescale required.
- 2.5 Option 2 could be implemented and would offer some benefit to shoppers and visitors without adversely affecting commuters. This would require a statutory legal notice and could take approximately five weeks to implement. However, the loss of income to the Council would be approximately £10-12,000 for each month of its implementation.
- 2.6 In conclusion it is considered that any measures to introduce free or reduced cost car parking in Blackwood would be inappropriate at this time. This is partly because of the issues mentioned in 2.1 and 2.2 above, and the fact there is insufficient time to implement such proposals in order to gain any appreciable benefit. The multi million pound bus station is scheduled to be operational in time for Christmas 2006.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 To provide safe and efficient transport infrastructure by means of cost effective management, maintenance and improvement of the network.
- 3.2 To work with others to regenerate communities.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 The Blackwood Traders association has expressed concerns over the financial viability of their member's businesses as a result of the impact of the ongoing Blackwood bus station improvement works. This has temporarily displaced bus services to the High Street and reduced public car parking provision around the bus station area and on the High Street.
- 4.2 The report considers in detail the options and implications of meeting the request of the Blackwood Traders association for free car parking in Council owned High Street and Bus Station car parks.

4.3 Strategy

By way of background it is worth remembering that the car parking strategy has evolved and improved since 1996 to discourage the use of selected car parks by commuters, making them more available for shoppers and visitors. At two to three year intervals, studies of car park usage, ticket sales and income are made and when appropriate changes to the tariffs proposed. Tariffs were last changed in June 2001. Pay and display car park usage and income has remained stable in Blackwood over recent years, even where the new Asda and other stores have almost doubled the number of car parking spaces provided.

- 4.4 To accede to this request could set a precedent where any future works by the Council in the main towns with charged car parks, would be followed by a request from traders to introduce free parking for the duration of the works. This would result in significant losses in income for the Council that would have a direct impact on the delivery of the Traffic Management service.

4.5 Council Controlled Car parks in Blackwood

The following car parks are owned and maintained by the Council and have the identified tariff structure:

- Bus Station car park – short stay (two hour maximum with no return for four hours)
- Cliff Road car park – long stay
- Courthouse car park – long stay
- Gordon Road car park – residents only
- High Street car park – short stay
- Highland Terrace – residents only
- Libanus car park – season ticket holders only
- Red Lion car park – short stay (two hour maximum with no return for four hours)
- Thornecombe Road No. 2 car park – long stay
- Thornecombe Road No. 3 car park – long stay
- Wesley car park – long stay
- Woodbine car park – short stay

- 4.6 The short stay car parks are directed towards shoppers and visitors and are generally well used. The long stay car parks are directed towards both shoppers and commuters.

4.7 Options for Free Car Parking in Blackwood

The following options have been considered to determine if they could meet the Blackwood Traders association's request:

1. Free parking in the Council's High Street and Bus Station car parks with no

- enforcement.
2. Free/reduced cost parking in the Council's High Street and Bus Station car parks with the current time restrictions applied and enforced.
 3. Free parking in the Council's High Street and Bus Station car parks with new time restrictions applied and enforced.

4.8 **Option 1**

Generally the overall parking provision for Blackwood is sufficient to cope with demand for most of the time. Allowing free uncontrolled parking in some or all of the car parks would result in commuter parking in car parks that would be most desirable for shoppers and visitors. This would only result in discouraging shoppers and visitors and would be detrimental to the aims of the Council to promote regeneration and economic vitality for the town. The impact would be even greater given that this would be during the run up to the Christmas period. It would also be contrary to the aims of the Blackwood Traders association to encourage more shoppers to the town. Therefore this should be dismissed as a viable option.

4.9 **Option 2**

Retaining the existing time restrictions but allowing free or reduced cost for the first two hours would enable the Council to maintain control of the car parks for long and short stay purposes. This would be an obvious attraction to shoppers and visitors without adversely affecting commuters. Introducing free parking for the first two hours is possible but, operationally, would require a longer time to reconfigure the pay & display machines and would incur costs from the machine supplier. It would also have the greatest impact on loss of income to the Council. Introducing a reduced charge of 10p for up to 2 hours in the High Street and Bus Station car parks could be achieved more quickly and by Council staff directly, and would enable a small offset of the loss in income to the Council. Such a change would have to be covered by a legal notice. This has a minimum three-week statutory notice period and would take approximately five weeks to implement (including an allowance for reconfiguring the pay & display machines).

4.10 Increasing the period of free/reduced cost stay beyond two hours (for High Street only) would encourage abuses where consecutive free tickets could be obtained. This could result in commuters exploiting the system to the disadvantage of shoppers and visitors having no parking spaces or less convenient spaces being available. This would obviously defeat the objective to encourage more shoppers and visitors.

4.11 Such a system would enable single visit normal enforcement. It is possible that some people would try to use the car park for long stay parking by returning to obtain repeat free tickets, this is less likely with a two hour maximum free/reduced cost stay. Those who do this could be identified by extra enforcement. Unless staff resources are increased, the time taken to do this would result in reduced time being spent elsewhere on enforcement and a small resultant loss of income from the remaining pay and display car parks.

4.12 **Option 3**

This option would enable restricted waiting times to be changed for the High Street car park that may be considered more attractive for shoppers e.g. a maximum of two hours with no return within four hours. The enforcement issues would be the same as identified for Option 2 (4.11) however, to implement this option would require a change to the Car Parking Order. This would require a statutory process to be undertaken that would take at least 3 months to complete. Given the intention to seek a change as soon as possible that would end in December 2006, this option should be ruled out.

5. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Option 1 is not considered appropriate but if implemented would result in a complete loss of income for the duration of its implementation. Parking officers could be redistributed to other areas to increase levels of enforcement there.

5.2 Option 2 as proposed in 4.9 with enforcement as identified in 4.11 would result in a loss of income to the Council of approximately £10-12,000 for each month of its implementation. The statutory notice process and modification of machines and signs would cost approximately £2,000 for free parking and £1000 for the reduced 10p charge. In addition for free parking, there would be a charge of £1,200 by the supplier to reconfigure the pay & display machines.

5.3 Option 3 has been discounted as unfeasible.

6. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Enforcing those who contravene free/reduced limited waiting could require additional staff resource. This would be achieved by reducing enforcement elsewhere.

7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1 No clear evidence has been provided to demonstrate that parking provision for shoppers or the ongoing bus station works are adversely affecting trade within Blackwood in recent months. Anecdotal evidence has been received that trade on the High Street has improved. Also, car park usage and income has remained stable in Blackwood. Acceding to this request has the potential to set a precedent that would result in significant losses in income and consequently adversely affect the delivery of the Traffic Management service.

7.2 As part of the major investment to provide a new bus station in Blackwood, a publicity campaign has been implemented to promote trade in the town during the course of the ongoing works for the bus station ('Blackwood defining the future').

7.3 Given the above and the timescale required to implement any proposal it is considered that any such action would be inappropriate at this time and would not achieve any appreciable benefit.

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Background Papers:

None

Appendices:

None