



CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL CAR PARKS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON WEDNESDAY
14TH OCTOBER 2020 AT 5.00PM**

PRESENT:

Councillor R. Gough – Chair

Councillors:

C. Elsbury, L. Harding and J. Roberts

Together with: -

C. Campbell (Transportation Engineering Manager) and (C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B. Owen, D. Preece and T. Williams. The Chair also welcomed Cllr J Ridgewell Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure and Councillor N. Dix as observers of the meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

3. CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL CAR PARKS TASK AND FINISH GROUP – 21ST SEPTEMBER 2020

RESOLVED that the minutes be approved as correct records and signed by the Chair.

4. WORKSHOP

The Scrutiny Manager introduced the workshop session which highlighted the main areas considered by the task and finish group and evidence provided. A series of prompt questions asked the group to provide their views on each issue in order to generate comments and conclusions.

Members were asked if they considered that the status quo should remain in respect of the car parks provision across the county borough. A majority of the group felt that the differences needed to be addressed and discrepancies rectified. It was recognised that this is a difficult matter to address and recognised that some may not agree with any proposals that the group recommend. Reference was made to the Welsh Government research reports on parking charges, previously considered by the group, which stated that to encourage visitors it is more important for Towns to have available spaces and to offer good facilities.

The group discussed the recent offer to provide free car parking during the current covid-19 pandemic to assist town centres. Members advised that since this has been introduced in Caerphilly the Twyn car park has been occupied from early morning by people working in the town who remain all day, thereby preventing visitors and shoppers from parking there. The group were informed that this has also been occurring in Blackwood resulting in complaints from businesses that visitors are not able to park in the central car parks. The group agreed it was important to recognise the difficulties that workers have if they must pay for parking every day, but did not support the town centre car parks remaining free as a permanent measure.

Members noted that Blackwood has significantly more parking spaces than any other town with a higher proportion pay and display, there are some free parking spaces and some of the outlying car parks such as the bus Station have very low usage. Review the designation of car parks as short or long stay tariff?

Members discussed offering concessions to workers or perhaps introducing an early morning charge and then offering free parking after 10am.

The group were advised that parity differences are minimal with an hourly rate charge difference of 10p to 20p applying to only two car parks, it is also important to consider the purpose of long term and short term parking to manage the spaces available and encourage turnover in short term car parks which are usually in central areas.

Members stated that it was important to understand the purpose of charging if it was to encourage turnover or to generate income. The group were advised that income covers operational costs and is ring fenced to the service area which includes transportation, engineering and highways. Car parks are not free to provide, there are regular running costs such as energy costs, staffing, maintenance and NNDR. There are irregular costs such as renewal and general replacement such as re-surfacing costs.

Welsh Government studies have shown that charging is more about control. Where car parks are free it is on a first come first served basis therefore workers can often take up spaces at the expense of visitors. In these instances, and where it is harder to park visitors will be discouraged from going to those towns.

Members highlighted that Bargoed free car park at Hanbury road has been free and hasn't been considered for pay and display because of the ongoing regeneration of the town. However, the main outstanding plateau (formally proposed as a cinema) is still being marketed and it isn't known when it is likely to be developed. It was also stated that should charges be introduced people are likely to park in Morrisons car park for short periods and people working in the town more likely to be affected.

The group discussed free park and ride car parks and acknowledged that the current administration has given an undertaking to retain free parking. However, Members raised concerns that the cost to maintain and support these car parks fall upon the council and is funded from income generated in towns. Whereas those benefitting from free parking are generally travelling outside the county borough. A small charge would offset the cost to provide and reduce the burden on other towns that currently charge.

The group agreed to include in their recommendations the following:

- 1. Standardise the respective Long Term and Short Term pay and display car park charges to the same hourly tariffs, at the current respective lowest rates.**
- 2. Ask Cabinet to consider a small daily charge for park and ride car parks to offset some of the costs to provide.**

The group discussed whether to introduce an initial free parking period for 1 or 2 hours in pay and display car parks however there was no support for this suggestion. It was felt that this would be utilised by workers in the town and would not help encourage visitors.

In order to support people working in town centres and also encourage usage of outer car parks, and reduce use of central car parks by workers all day to free them up for visitors/shoppers. The following recommendation was supported:

- 3. Caerphilly County Borough offer local businesses reduced charge parking permits for their staff to park in car parks, officers to investigate most appropriate car parks where this could be offered.**

Members considered the costs to support and maintain car parks across the county borough and agreed that surplus income generated by car park charging should be retained for the maintenance and improvement of car parks. The following recommendation was supported.

- 4. All surplus income generated from parking charges to be ring fenced for maintenance and improvement of car parks, through a planned maintenance programme, including signage and lighting improvements.**

Members agreed that the current informal concession at Crescent Road Car Park in Caerphilly to allow Parents and Carers to park for a short period of time whilst dropping off children and picking them up is useful in reducing congestion. It was acknowledged that there are still people choosing to park close to the school, but it was recognised that without this concession the situation would be much worse.

Members were also advised that Libanus School in Blackwood is taking part in an exclusion zone, so parents and carers are currently using the offer for free parking in car parks close to the school. There is concern that the once free parking ends in January that there may be issues. Therefore, the following recommendation was supported.

- 5. Where there are car parks in close proximity to schools, that are having parking issues during school drop off and pick up times, Officers are given discretion to allow a free parking concession to parents/carers for a limited time and in consultation with local ward Members.**

The group were reminded that during the consultation carried out with Town and Community Councils the group were asked to consider allowing free parking at the Twyn car park in Caerphilly in Remembrance Sunday. Members were inclined to agree that this was a reasonable request. It was identified during discussion that this is the only car park in the county borough to charge on Sundays and it appears to be an historical matter. Members were advised that to remove this charge altogether would not make a significant difference. Therefore, the following recommendation was supported.

- 6. Remove Sunday parking charges at Twyn Car park on Sundays, this has been an historical arrangement that is no longer required.**

Following discussion about the Twyn Car park, a Member asked if the Council could offer free car parking on St Davids day across the whole county borough. It was agreed that this would be best done by a general message through Communications as opposed to changing signage

and covering payment machines, as this would have resource and time implications. Therefore, the following recommendation was supported.

7. Cabinet be asked to consider not enforcing car park charges on St Davids day.

The group considered the previous discussion in respect of changes to payment machines and were reassured that this is already planned for January 2021 and therefore will not make any recommendation. Assurance was sought in respect of methods of payment which will continue to include cash payment. Security of the machines was discussed, and officer agreed to provide some detail on incidences and CCTV.

It was agreed to consider free car parks and charging at country parks at the next meeting planned on 28th October 2020.

The meeting closed at 18:42pm

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the next meeting they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR