

## THE PROPOSAL FOR PAID FOR PARKING ON THE STREETS OF MARLOW

### References

- A: FOI/17/1254 DATED 2 Nov 17 from Joanna Kelly of the BCC [Copy attached]
- B. WDC figures for car park occupancy in Marlow 2017 [Copy attached]

This submission is made on behalf of the Marlow Society.

When we found out, by chance of the existence of BCC Cabinet Member Report No. T21.17 entitled *Marlow town centre waiting, loading and parking review* we asked the Marlow Town Council for its reaction. MTC was unaware of the report. Subsequently MTC and the Society found the BCC Parking Implementation Plan 2016, dated 17th October, another document of which both parties were unaware. We were extremely surprised to find that the BCC was intending to implement a policy which nobody in Marlow had heard about.

We now find that a decision due 26 March 2018 by Cabinet will determine the future of a County-wide Parking Delivery Plan [PDP]. On 27 February 2018 we asked Dave Roberts for a copy of this Plan and was advised that it will be “available on the BCC website, prior to the Cabinet meeting – usually about one week before”. In other words a document which surely will have a major role in the way that BCC handles its proposal to introduce paid for parking on the streets of Marlow might be available on 19 March. The consultation closes on 10 March. As TfB is fully aware of both dates then we have to conclude that it is a deliberate act to push forward the charging plan regardless of the probability that the PDP will have a bearing on the way respondents might have replied to the consultation. Such practice is not acceptable and we look to our County Councillor to press for an extension to the consultation and / or the opportunity to submit a supplementary response once the PDP is in the public domain.

The PIP (page 22) describes your aim to be for parking spaces to be readily available to support town centers. So far you have not offered any statistically valid information on the current rate of turnover of spaces. Cllr Shaw’s declared intention is to improve the turnover; how are you to determine the degree of improvement if you have no valid statistical base with which to draw a comparison? At present this stated aim cannot be demonstrated in a valid manner so we are left with the conclusion that it is a chimera and the real objective is to raise money to offset the current deficit in parking management throughout the County.

Do you know what proportion of the parking bays are vacant at varying times of the day?

If you don’t know, will you find out before assuming that parking charging will increase available spaces?

‘Those who use a service should pay for or contribute to the cost of that service’. BCC has failed to quantify service cost. If the cost is small then what is the problem? If large we need to know because it has a significant impact on the path to an agreed conclusion.

There are no proposals provided that might lead to a reduction in congestion. Indeed, a more regular turnover of parking spaces would be expected to lead to longer delays to traffic and to increase on-street air pollution levels.

Reference A, a response to a FOI request, provided the Society with the following information:

**What is the gross income realised from PCN’s annually in Marlow for the last five financial years?**

The full information cannot be provided as the current parking IT system is being purged of historic data to allow for an IT upgrade.

The last two years information is available and is set out below:

PCN gross income for greater Marlow in 2015/16 £78,204

Net income - £19,533

PCN gross income for greater Marlow in 2016/17 £78,531

Net income - £19,206

**How much gross revenue has the BCC estimated would be gathered from putting in paid for parking on the streets of Marlow? What is the basis for the calculation used to determine this figure?**

£379,000 - Parking occupancy, payment rate.

The figures establish that parking in Marlow currently provides the BCC with a small income. The introduction of paid for parking must therefore be aimed at raising revenue to compensate for losses elsewhere.

PIP (page 14) states that the annual deficit is around £500,000. Reference A shows a cumulative deficit of £655,000 at the end of 2016/7. Options to reduce the deficit are:

1. Reducing expenditure
2. Efficiencies
3. Increasing the income
4. A combination of all three

During the ‘drop-in’ Opinion Survey we were unable to find a BCC representative who could explain which of these options was currently being applied and how and when they would pay off the deficit and sustain the budget in credit.

BCC has failed conspicuously to show the people of Marlow any justification for the introduction of paid for parking. It has not demonstrated how it is currently reducing the outstanding deficit. Inevitably, we conclude that Marlow is seen as a soft option and a way to resolve poor deficit management during the past two years or more. Until a sustainable budget plan can be demonstrated, any suggestion of paid for parking should be put on hold.

In Reference B we find that a negligible proportion of vehicles stay parked in on-street bays for the full working day. It is reasonable to conclude that those commuting into Marlow for work are parking on residential streets, a supposition borne out by the observation of all Marlovians and supported by a recently released set of BCC figures for car park utilization in 2017. The off-road car parks, which have an extremely high occupancy rate, meet the requirements of most longer-term shoppers. This is also supported by the WDC figures. In the light of the current consideration of parking issues we have made a point of observing closely the availability of on-street parking spaces on the High St and Institute Road. It is very unusual not to find at least one space, often 4 or 5. We suspect that our sampling during the last 3 months has produced a better understanding of the reality than that of the flawed survey that TfB paid for last year. Our survey results undermine the ability of TfB to “improve turnover”.

You have stated that it is policy to price on-street parking at a higher rate than that of nearby car parks. That, in part, is to “push” longer-term visitors off the streets and into the car parks. Given the very high occupancy of the car parks for much of the day we contend that a more likely result is to increase competition to find a slot on the residential roads.

Your proposals fail to address the fundamental lack of parking in Marlow sufficient to meet the commercial and social needs of the town. The PIP requires the provision of parking spaces for commercial delivery vehicles. This has not been addressed. Until you come up with a proposal jointly prepared with WDC and MTC you will be seen to have reneged on the promise given many times in the past of a holistic approach to parking by the three authorities.

We agree that the current method of enforcement is tedious, inefficient, and totally inappropriate in the light of available technology. TfB’s only offering is the introducing of ticketing. That would certainly make life easier for the enforcement staff, but is inconvenient for drivers (possibly with children) wanting to make drop-in purchases in the High Street, even if a free initial period were to be offered. During the Opinion Survey on 15 February, we asked the TfB representatives if they had knowledge of best-in-use methodologies used by other local authorities. We did not get an answer.

You told us that the BCC withdrew from its contract with the WDC to provide a single enforcement team covering roads and car parks. Surely this decision must be re-examined and a holistic solution found. As long as the BCC and WDC are seen to be operating separate fiefdoms you will not gain the confidence of Marlovians. The centre of Marlow is surveyed by a very efficient CCTV system operated by the WDC. Statistically valid data on traffic movements and turnover could be established by sampling the video to give us all a better understanding of where we are now before launching into the unknown. Take a pace back. Be open. Recognise that you must show alternative ways of improving enforcement. Show publicly what measures will bring the County's deficit into a sustainable position.

BCC has a democratic responsibility to show the people of Marlow that a comprehensive analysis has been undertaken to ascertain the best method on managing parking on the highway without the imposition of charging. This is what everyone we have discussed this issue with wants.

Until you come up with a proposal jointly prepared with WDC and MTC you will be seen to have reneged on the promise given many times in the past of a holistic approach to parking by the three authorities. Such an approach is essential if we are to protect and enhance a sustainable and viable future for this vibrant historic Buckinghamshire riverside town, so often referred to as the 'Jewel in the crown of the River Thames', England's principal river.