

On-street parking charges in Haslemere – a case summary

Background

On Tuesday 25 May 2010 Surrey County Council's (SCC) Transport Select Committee considered a report on the future enforcement and administration of civil parking enforcement in Surrey. The agency agreements whereby Borough and District Councils carried out on-street parking enforcement on behalf of SCC had been amended so that they all ended on 31 March 2011 and SCC had little time to consider alternative options for future arrangements. **SCC's main concern was that the civil parking enforcement operation costs about £3.6M with income of £3.1M (deficit of about £0.5M).**

The report to the Transport Select Committee says that SCC had limited control over what they were charged by the Borough and District Councils. In fact SCC could have taken the opportunity to discuss costs at any time during the previous six years that the agency agreements had been operating. The agency agreements specifically provided for reviews which could have looked at costs and action to reduce deficits.

SCC, with the advice of the consultant that they employed in setting up the agencies, **originally accepted that on-street parking enforcement can only operate at a deficit**, particularly in Boroughs where there are no CPZ's or on-street parking charges to generate income.

The original reason for choosing the Boroughs and Districts to operate on-street enforcement in their areas was that they were also operating off-street car parks, most of which operate at a surplus. This arrangement is, potentially, a better deal for the Surrey taxpayer as a whole.

It is only more recently that SCC has announced that they wish to reduce the on-street parking deficit. The analysis described in the Transport Select Committee report was carried out with no consultation with the Boroughs and Districts. Instead of proposing radical changes that affect all of the Boroughs and Districts, their staff and their off street parking operations, SCC could have worked with the agents to find ways of making the economies needed to change the financial 'balance sheet'.

The proposals for Haslemere, which were discussed by the Waverley Local Committee on December 16th 2011, have changed very little from those first proposed by SCC in February 2011. They include on-street charging with an initial free period in the retail areas and certain areas in the vicinity of the station, residents permits at a cost of £50 per annum and controlled parking zones.

Concerns raised so far about the SCC proposals

- SCC did not adequately work with Waverley Borough Council (WBC) to reduce the £0.5M deficit and work towards a break-even point under the previous arrangements;
- SCC did not consider any other options for controlled parking and still has not provided a projected balance sheet demonstrating that their proposals will be cost-effective. For example, they are proposing to introduce free parking periods in some areas and yet in the original proposals approved by Cabinet earlier this year this possibility was rejected as financially unviable. They now say that these revised proposals should still mean the cost of operating the pay and display equipment is covered by the income from parking charges but provide no figures to back this up.
- The proposals go against the 'partnership working' that SCC has been promoting. Working in close co-operation with other parking providers (such as WBC and Railtrack) would ensure a holistic approach to the problem and a better long-term solution for residents, shopworkers and businesses.
- SCC has not carried out adequate consultations with WBC, Haslemere Town Council, local residents and local businesses in reaching their recommendations. There has been no public meeting, each group having been 'consulted' in isolation and in an atmosphere of secrecy.

- Contractors from Guildford are currently employed to carry out parking enforcement, which has resulted in a loss of 'localness'. Haslemere has elderly people unable to walk far who rely on being able to stop briefly to pick up or drop off goods from local shops. There has been an increase in the number of incidents reported to the Chamber of Trade where these vulnerable shoppers have been deliberately targeted by enforcement officers, where a local warden once used discretion.
- The proposals for the retail areas go against the findings of the recently published Government commissioned report by Mary Portas into the future of the High Street. In view of this, Haslemere Chamber of Trade asked for these areas to be excluded from the published proposals but this request was ignored by Waverley Local Committee.
- SCC state that on-street charging will encourage better use of the car parks but these car parks are already close to capacity during peak periods.
- The proposed locations of the meters are in some cases many metres from the parking bays they service. The proposed 'cashless' payment method (i.e. paying over the phone by card) will be time-consuming and anyone using this method will incur a further cost on top of their parking charge. Both factors will act as discourage people 'popping in' to their local shops and affect local businesses.
- SCC suggest that on-street charging will decrease congestion and CO2 emissions caused by people cruising for spaces but have provided no evidence that this is a significant problem in Haslemere.
- SCC say that they have done an equality impact assessment which has identified potential negative impacts for certain groups but provide no evidence for this. Those on a low household income could be worse off by up to £100 per month if they park regularly in the town (e.g. shop workers)
- SCC suggest that the reduction of free parking could encourage drivers catching the train from Haslemere to catch a train closer to where they live but a) they have no figures to confirm where people drive in from and b) there are many villages surrounding Haslemere that don't have a train station closer than Haslemere and where development proposals are ongoing, such as Midhurst.