

DECISION ARISING FROM THE PRESENTATION OF A PETITION IN RELATION TO CAR PARKING IN MARKET RASEN

Extract from the minutes of Full Council meeting held on 4 July 2016 at the Guildhall, Marshalls Yard, Gainsborough.

24 PRESENTATION OF PETITION

A Petition, signed by over 2,000 people, had been received by the Council, stating: "We the undersigned object to West Lindsey District Council's proposal to charge for car parking in its 3 Market Rasen car parks. We call upon the Council to withdraw the proposal, investigate further the likely effect on businesses and other ways to create more car park spaces. We ask that the Council fully consults with local residents and businesses on any future proposals."

Mr Adrian Campbell, the Lead Petitioner had been unable to be present at the meeting, therefore the Chairman used her Chair's discretion to allow persons in the public gallery to speak on the petition.

Two members of the public addressed the Councillors stating that they felt that the introduction of parking charges would finish traders' businesses. Charges were being removed in other areas as this was felt more attractive to passing trade. If tourists saw parking restrictions they did not stop. Turnover for local traders had dropped over the last four years due to the recession and further losses could not be sustained. Up to 25 shops had been lost in the town. Marshall's Yard in Gainsborough was attractive to shoppers but could not be compared to Market Rasen and it was feared that small shops would shut down.

Councillor Smith as Ward Member for Market Rasen read out a statement submitted by the Lead Petitioner, which he would have made had he been present.

"Thank you for the opportunity to present and introduce the petition about Market Rasen Car Park charges.

Over 2633 people have signed this petition and the population of Market Rasen is only 3,300 so it shows an immense depth of feeling about this issue.

The second **and most important point** is that it is **NOT** a petition asking that the whole issue be abandoned, it is asking to look again into the effect on Market Rasen businesses, come up with revised proposals and fully consult before going ahead.

There are 2 reasons why the issue deserves further thought. One is that the Prosperous Communities Committee has not been given the full facts and the second is that the consultation process was flawed.

There are 2 key facts that the PCC were not made aware of. One is that at the same time as WLDC were considering this, the Scrutiny Committee at ELDC were considering abandoning a charging policy brought in 3 years earlier at

13 car parks because of the damage it had done to businesses there.

The second fact is that despite a WLDC policy to "maintain and enhance the town centre to create a viable and attractive range of shops and services" Market Rasen has actually declined dramatically.

Authoritative statistics from Venuescore that WLDC officers use to show how much Gainsborough has been improved show at the same time how far Market Rasen has declined but this was not reported to the PCC.

Regarding the consultation process there were numerous flaws:-
When it was first announced to the press, this was released and reported:-

WLDC prosperous communities committee chairman Coun Owen Bierley said: "The idea of introducing a car parking charge to Market Rasen is a way of trying to support local businesses.

"It is hoped it will increase the turnover of spaces for shoppers in the town, rather than commuters parking up all day as they commute to other destinations." but in a letter to Sir Edward Leigh replying to a residents concerns WLDC said that the main driver was one of recovering costs. This gave out a mixed message for the consultation process.

That same press information stated that there would be a 12 week consultation period. When it was eventually announced it was cut down to 4 weeks.

Crucially, the consultation period coincided with an absence of any constituted body in Market Rasen to represent businesses. The Portas Pilot committee had just disbanded and the new Market Rasen Town Centre Partnership has not yet been set up.

The distillation of 120 public responses reported in Paper C presented to the PCC has not fairly represented the response in numerous respects and would have been more fairly analysed by a 3rd party. The most critical omission was the treatment of the by now decision of ELDC Scrutiny Committee to abandon charges in 10 of the 13 car parks where charges had been brought in 3 years ago.

The officers' report to the PCC talks only about Louth and Brigg, large towns similar to Gainsborough whose experience is much more appropriate to future parking policy in Gainsborough.

What is not reported in Paper C is the effect of charges in Horncastle, Alford, Burgh le Marsh, Spilsby, Coninsby etc all communities similar to Market Rasen and now enjoying free parking again.

Paper C does acknowledge that - quote "The implementation of charging may have an initial impact on the level of visitors and footfall in the town" but does not attempt to put figures on how this will affect business.

How many shops will close? What will be the reduction in turnover felt by others? How many shopworkers will be made redundant?

If the information is strong enough to state that a £50,000 profit will be made in Market Rasen then it should be possible to work out a figure for the collateral damage so councillors can make an informed decision on whether it should go ahead.

But that information is not there and it is not there either to estimate that the measure will return a profit.

Why?

The lead officer said this at the last PCC meeting

"we don't have a lot of data on car park usage in Market Rasen"

That was stated 19 minutes into the webcast of the committee meeting if you care to view it.

To repeat

"we don't have a lot of data on car park usage in Market Rasen"

This is an astonishing admission this far into the decision process and brings us to the heart of the petition, that more research needs to be done on the likely effect of the measures.

What I am advised is that WLDC would not have to pay for this research. There are sufficient funds left in the Portas Pilot account to pay for that research.

So, this is a humble appeal for you to reinstate the consultation process extending it to 12 weeks to allow this research to take place and contribute to a fairer and more equitable solution."

Councillor Smith then stated that he was duty bound to represent the views of the majority or residents, most of which did not want the introduction of parking charges. Councillor Smith had himself voted against that aspect of the Council's budget in March. The charges would be a short term fix for a long term solution and there would be irreparable damage done to Market Rasen.

Councillor Young echoed the views of the public speakers and the petitioner and stated that the final nail in the coffin would be the subsequent parking enforcement which was the subject of a question from himself later in the meeting. There were alternative ways of improving vehicle movement in car parks without imposing charges.

Lengthy debate ensued on the matter during which it was noted that if the consultation process was shown to have been flawed it would have to be done again, however the evidence of the quoted 12 week consultation would need to be produced. The statutory period required was 21 days and this had been extended to 28.

It was felt that Market Rasen had been suffering decline for some time, hence the Portas Pilot, and there had been complaints over time regarding the lack of available parking spaces due to them being filled by commuters taking them for full days.

It was not correct that the primary objective was cost recovery, however car parks had to be funded, not only the cost of ticket machines and equipment, but surface maintenance, which was currently in poor condition for walking upon giving potential for injury. It was commented that many of the signatories on the petition were residents within walking distance of the town centre.

A number of Councillors supported the content of the petition and felt that the imposition of charging in the car parks would harm Market Rasen and this was not the answer to current problems. It was generally felt that further research needed to be undertaken and more statistical evidence obtained.

The Chairman of the Challenge and Improvement Committee, which had carried out pre-scrutiny, stated that it was important to have equity across West Lindsey, and this meant the principle of charging, but not the actual cost. The ticket machines would provide the required usage data for analysis, which was proposed to include an element of free parking.

The Chief Executive assured Members that if the press release which quoted a 12 week consultation period was made available, it would be investigated and an apology issued if appropriate.

It was moved and seconded that the Market Rasen Car Parking report be considered by the Prosperous Communities Committee at its next meeting.

On being voted upon it was:

RESOLVED that the Market Rasen Car Parking report be considered by the Prosperous Communities Committee at its next meeting.

Extract from Minutes of Prosperous Communities Committee meeting 19 July 2016

23 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Governance and Civic Officer advised the Committee that one person had registered to address the Committee, regarding Agenda item 6 (a) (Update and Comments from the Public on the Implementation of Parking Charges in Market Rasen).

The Chairman then welcomed Mr Adrian Campbell to the meeting and invited him to address the Committee.

Mr Campbell then stated that he had intended to be present at the Council meeting on 4 July, however on being told that the meeting had been cancelled he had telephoned a large number of people to tell them not to attend, had this not been the case, many more people would have been present.

Mr Campbell asserted that further research was required to establish facts and accurate data. At the last meeting of the Prosperous Communities Committee the lead officer had stated that not much data was available, so accurate predictions were not possible.

Mr Campbell then highlighted errors in the report – the risk assessment did not consider the impact on businesses, just budgets; the consultation section stated that there were no objections from statutory consultees, this was not true as the objection from the local disabled group was not reported; and the assessment of Louth was not a like for like comparison as Louth was closer to Gainsborough on size.

The tenders for re-lining the car parks were not adequately researched as it would be possible to get more spaces in. Businesses were being unfairly treated, and there was no equality across West Lindsey, Gainsborough was improving whereas Market Rasen was declining. There would be no cost to undertaking the research as there was a sum of money remaining in the Portas Pilot pot. Mr Campbell then requested that the consultation be undertaken again for the promised 12 weeks. To impose the parking charges now would be the wrong thing to do.

27 UPDATE AND COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PARKING CHARGES IN MARKET RASEN (PRCC.14 16/17)

The Commercial Director introduced the report which sought to provide an update on progress and implementation costs, and an overview of the public feedback on the implementation notice. It was stated that the implementation of parking charges in Market Rasen had been agreed as part of the overall Car Parking Strategy and also as part of the Council's budget setting in March. Three principles to be adhered to through the process were: full cost recovery; equity of approach across the district; and support for businesses with an element of free parking.

The recommendations for implementation were set out in the report, and it was noted that due to delays the lining and resurfacing of the car parks was yet to be commissioned, therefore the charges were unlikely to be implemented before October.

The Chairman pointed out that the issue had been considered by several committees and meetings, and Members' workshops, and many ideas, opinions, feedback, and the petition had all been given consideration. The report now before the Committee brought all the issues together, and the recommendations were to implement the charges and to request a further report after six months to review the impact.

Councillor Rollings expressed concerns regarding the implementation of charges and felt that there would be harm to local businesses and that Market Rasen was not a comparable size against Gainsborough.

Councillor Smith then proposed an amended recommendation that “the request in the petition be granted and the Market Rasen Town Centre partnership be given time to undertake research to better inform a new car parking strategy at no cost to this authority as the current scheme as I have outlined simply does not stand up to scrutiny.”

Councillor Smith’s proposal was seconded by Councillor Rollings, and on being voted upon the motion fell.

The recommendations as set out in the report were then moved, seconded and voted upon. It was then

RESOLVED that:

- a) the implementation of current charging proposals in Market Rasen be progressed; and
- b) a further report be requested after six months after charging is implemented to review the impact.

Note: Councillors Smith and Rollings voted against the recommendations