

		AGENDA ITEM 5
		EDE/02/11
Committee:	Economic Development and Environment Policy & Scrutiny Committee	
Date:	24 February 2011	
CALL IN OF DECISION ON THE WITHDRAWAL OF SATURDAY OPERATION AT THE SANDON PARK AND RIDE SITE, CHELMSFORD (Ref FP321-10-10)		
Enquiries to:	Christine Sharland, Governance Officer 01245 430450 Christine.sharland@essex.gov.uk	

Councillor Mackrory has called in this decision on the Withdrawal of Saturday Operation at the Sandon Park and Ride Site, Chelmsford (ref: FP321-10-10). A copy of the decision notice is attached at Appendix A, together with the Notification of Call-In form at Appendix B.

In line with the procedure for handling the call in of a decision, an informal meeting was held on 7 February, and a note of that meeting is attached at Appendix C. At that meeting Councillor Mackrory requested further information that is now attached at Appendix D.

Following the informal meeting, Councillor Mackrory confirmed that he did not wish to withdraw the call in, and therefore the matter stands referred to this Committee.

At today's meeting Councillor Mackrory will be given the opportunity to make his case for calling in the decision. As the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation is not available to attend this meeting his Deputy, Councillor, will then be given the opportunity to answer the case and seek to justify the proposed decision. The Committee will then have the opportunity to ask questions.

Action required by the Committee:

Ultimately the Committee must decide what action it will wish to take in this matter. The options that are available to the Committee are set out in Part 20.14 of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Procedure Rules as follows:

- ‘(xiii) Having considered the decision, the Committee may refer it back to the decision taker setting out in writing its concerns or refer the matter to the full Council also with a record of its concerns. Upon a referral to a decision taker, the decision shall be reconsidered within five clear working days amending the decision or not before adopting a final decision.**
 - (xiv) If the Committee does not refer a decision to either the decision taker or the Council, the decision shall take effect at the conclusion of the meeting of the Committee.**
 - (xv) Following consideration of a call-in by the Committee, the Governance Officer will liaise with the Chairman and Group Spokespersons to agree the formal notification of its decision to go to the interested parties and, if the call-in is referred to Council, to agree the wording of the report to Council.**
 - (xvi) If, following a reference of a decision from an Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Council objects to that decision it will be referred to the decision taker together with the Council’s views. The decision taker will reconsider the decision within five clear working days deciding whether or not to amend the decision before implementing it.**
 - (xvii) If the Council does not refer a decision to a decision taker then the decision shall take effect at the conclusion of the meeting of the Council.**
 - (xviii) A request to call in a decision may be withdrawn at any time by those making the request.’**
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ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL

HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION

APPENDIX A

EXECUTIVE DECISION

Short Title of Decision:

Withdrawal of Saturday Operation at the Sandon
Park & Ride Site, Chelmsford

FP Ref: 321/10/10

*Tick the relevant box below

Key Decision by Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

- in consultation with another Cabinet Member
- in consultation with the Director for Highways and Transportation

Non Key Decision by Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

- in consultation with another Cabinet Member
- agreed with the Director for Highways and Transportation

Non Key Decision by Director for Highways and Transportation

- in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation
- on own account

Recommendation - Decision(s)

To reduce the cost of operation of Park and Ride by closing the sites on Saturdays. The site's opening times will be reviewed for special events and around the Christmas and New Year period.

Background (including any background papers)

The County Council has run a Park & Ride scheme at the Sandon site since 31/3/2006 and the second site at Chelmer Valley is scheduled to open on 1st April 2011.

In line with its transformation programme, the County Council has been reviewing its services in an effort to reduce its costs. Several options were considered for reducing the cost of the Park & Ride, including reducing the frequency of the service during the day and removing the park and ride service from the free concessionary travel scheme – which is technically feasible, although with some difficulty. None of these considerations suggested they would produce a significant level of saving while retaining the general utility of the service.

The specification of the vehicles has been lowered and delivered a reduction in the cost of operation and the withdrawal of the Park & Ride Service on Saturdays has been examined as an additional option to reduce the cost of operation.

Analysis indicates that the service is least heavily used on Saturdays with most of those who do make use of it doing so outside peak travel periods. In addition peak congestion on Saturdays tends to be lighter than on weekdays and people travelling at this time, tend to have somewhat different travel patterns and destinations. It is estimated that approximately £85,000 can be saved by discontinuing the Saturday opening of Park and Ride.

It was also noted that on some Saturdays, particularly around Christmas and other holidays, the volume of traffic does rise significantly and the site could be of use on these occasions.

Having considered the matter carefully, I have therefore determined that the Park & Ride site will cease to open on Saturdays with effect from 01/04/2011 but retaining the option of reopening the site to cope with specific high volume Saturdays at discretion.

Consultation

The Local County Member, Cllr Mackrory has objected to this proposal citing the impact on congestion, trade and the carbon footprint in Chelmsford Town Centre.

Discussions have taken place with the two contractors, First Essex Buses and Chelmsford Borough Council, neither of whom have raised any objections to this proposal in principle.

Local Parish Councils have been consulted and they have expressed concerns regarding the impact on congestion, trade and the carbon footprint in Chelmsford Town Centre and the short time allowed to respond to the consultation.

Surveys have also been undertaken with users at the Sandon site between 8th January and the 15th January. Comments received generally suggest sites remain open. In addition other comments relate to the impact on congestion and trade in the town centre, and for a few the ability to continue with employment. Suggestions were also made including, reducing the level of service on a Saturday, charging for children and concessionary pass users and charging per car to encourage and increase use on a Saturday.

Human Resources Implications

This decision has no ECC staffing issues.

Financial Implications

Budget Reference: PTPR0000

This decision will reduce the costs and subsidy required for the Park and Ride operation with the projected Net savings of £85,000. This has been calculated from the reduction offered by the contractors and deducting the revenue that would have been taken which includes an estimate for Chelmer Valley returning a saving of £85,000 per year.

Section 151 Officer comments: There are no specific S151 issues relating to this proposed decision.

Policy Fit / Reasoning

Policy Reference: Local Transport Plan, Essex Road Passenger Transport Strategy, Accessibility Planning Strategy

Is a departure from policy needed?

Yes		No	✓
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 Is a Cabinet Decision needed?

Recommended change in policy to be made with this decision:

N/a

Legal Implications

Monitoring Officer for comment: There are no implications to the proposal from the Monitoring Officers perspective.

Originating Officer

I certify that:

- there is an approved budget for the expenditure arising from this decision
- guidance and protocol has been followed as per attached checklist

Details

Name

Nick Blackall

Designation

Local Bus Manager

Extension	X 51249
Consultation	
Designation	
* Delete when not relevant to the decision	
Area Highway Manager N/a	
*Head of ESH Finance	
* Director for Highways and Transportation (for a decision by the Cabinet Member)	
Decision <div style="float: right;">* Tick approval / non-approval in the relevant box below</div> <p>With regard to the recommended decision: I approve</p> <p>Reasons for the decision (to be completed by the decision taker):</p> <div style="height: 100px; border: 1px solid black; margin-top: 5px;"></div>	
Designation	
* Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation	

Proposal to discontinue Park and Ride on Saturdays

	Main Comment	Officer's comment
Objector A	Expressed concern that the withdrawal of Saturday Park and Ride would increase congestion, carbon emissions and requested detail on the figures quoted for the savings and the promotion undertaken to encourage usage on a Saturday.	The main objective of Park and Ride is to reduce traffic congestion during the week and in particular during peak hours. Usage at Sandon is far lower on a Saturday compared to a weekday. Passenger numbers on Saturday's represents 10% of total passenger usage and the number of cars entering the site represents 8% of the total. The saving figures have been calculated by using the revised contract rates offered by the contractors, deducting revenue to give a net cost saving. Town Centre car parks and local bus services offer alternative options for the majority of customers.
Objector B	As for objector A, but with additional concerns that Park and Ride provides an important source of public transport and the short period for the undertaking of the consultation.	As for objector A.
Objector C	As for objector A but with additional comments on the potential impact on trade in the town centre	As for objector A.
Objector D	As for objector A but with an additional comment on the additional pressure on town centre parking	As for objector A.
Objector E	Concern that this will be detrimental to the success of Chelmer Valley before it has opened and requested more information to understand the background to the decision.	As for objector A.

Notification of Call-in

Decision title and reference number Withdrawal of Saturday Operation at the Sandon Park and Ride Site, Chelmsford FP321-10-10	
Cabinet Member responsible Norman Hume, Highways and Transortation	Date decision published 31 January 2011
Last day of call in period 3 February 2011	Last day of 10-day period to resolve the call-in Thursday, 17 February 2011
Reasons for Making the Call in <p>I am calling in the decision because it directly contradicts the Vision of the Essex Local Transport Plan 2006-2011, in particular four of the five objectives listed under Strategy and Objectives Page 12. These objectives, now described as outcomes, are repeated in the Local Transport Plan now out to consultation, page 17.</p> <p>I believe the decision to be misguided, short-sighted and damaging. In my view this would be a retrograde step, as if ECC is serious about reducing congestion and, therefore, carbon emissions, then everything should be done to reduce the use of the car in our urban areas.</p> <p>Furthermore, my request for the detail behind the “saving” and what promotional efforts have been made to encourage shoppers to use the Park and Ride on Saturdays, made to the HT Transport Liaison Manager on 9 January, has not been provided, despite a reminder on 31 January. Therefore, a meaningful judgement of this decision has not been possible.</p> <p>As a local Chelmsford Member I am only too well aware of the congestion on Saturdays in Parkway and the entrance to the Meadows car park. The congestion extends to the Army and Navy and beyond and to the multi storey car park roundabout to the west, this then blocks traffic exiting Victoria Road. In addition traffic stacks up on Highbridge Road to Springfield Road. All of this contributes to traffic in the town centre and must have a negative effect on the attractiveness of Chelmsford for shoppers.</p>	
Signed: Mike Mackrory	Dated: Thursday, 3 February 2011

For completion by the Governance Officer	
Date call in Notice Received Thursday, 3 February 2011	Date of informal meeting
Does the call in relate to a Schools issue No	If yes, date when Parent Governor Reps and Diocesan Reps invited to the meeting n/a
Date of Executive Scrutiny Committee Meeting (if applicable)	Date call in withdrawn / resolved

Notes of Informal Meeting regarding the Call-In of a Decision

Call in of decision reference FP321/10/10 on the withdrawal of Saturday Operation at the Sandon Park and Ride Site, Chelmsford.

Note of an informal meeting held at County Hall, Chelmsford on Monday, 7 February 2011

Present:

Councillor Mike Mackrory, responsible for calling the decision in
Councillor Norman Hume, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation
Councillor Roger Walter, Deputy to Cabinet Member

Christine Sharland, Governance Officer
Nick Blackall, Local Bus Manager
Thomas Marsh, Cabinet Support Officer

At the outset of the meeting Councillor Mackrory outlined his reasons for calling in this decision as set out in his 'Notification Call-in' form, and confirmed that he had not been provided with the background information that he had been seeking since 9 January on the reasons for the proposal to withdraw the Saturday park and ride service in Chelmsford.

In response Councillor Hume confirmed that the projected net savings of £85,000 related to both the Sandon site, and the estimated savings from the Chelmer Valley site that will soon be opened. He acknowledged Councillor Mackrory's reference to the aim of reducing traffic congestion and carbon emissions in Essex, but stressed that the current pressure to identify savings required him to review priorities in the Highways Service. The Sandon Park and Ride scheme opened in 2006 and despite the fact that the public is aware of the facility, it is not well used on a Saturday and incurs significant costs in contrast with its operation on weekdays.

During the week a lot of people use the park and ride buses for work, and the service does contribute to a reduction in peak hour congestion as well as better air quality in the town. There is also a steady flow of customers over the course of the day. However, there is not the same high level of demand on Saturdays as there is alternative parking available to shoppers in the town that is also more convenient for shopping purposes. In essence the Saturday operation is not value for money at present with the costs outweighing the benefits.

Councillor Walters pointed out that park and ride provides subsidised car parking. While during the week the environmental benefits might outweigh the costs of the operation, the situation was different on a Saturday because of the lower number of customers

using the facility. Given that funds are limited, it would be difficult to justify keeping the Saturday service when there are other priorities yielding greater benefits.

The importance in the timing of the decision was also highlighted by the Cabinet Member. At present the withdrawal of the Saturday operation is scheduled to take effect on 1 April 2011. Any changes in bus services have to be referred to the Traffic Commissioner 56 days before the change may become effective. As the withdrawal proposal has been submitted to the Traffic Commissioner a new notice reinstating the service would have to be lodged as soon as possible, and then if it was agreed subsequently to withdraw the service a further notice would be necessary – all the changes would be subject to the regulatory time provisions being fulfilled.

At present the Saturday service operates from 7.00 am to 7.00pm. Councillor Mackrory enquired if a reduced Saturday operation would be feasible. In reply he was advised that the degree of any savings were likely to be outweighed by the operational costs of providing even a reduced service on that day eg costs associated with supervision, drivers, and office expenses. Furthermore a reduction in the frequency of buses could prove to be less attractive to potential customers. Overall a reduced service would not be efficient working.

It was confirmed that it was intended to operate a Saturday Park and Ride service at peak shopping times during the year such as at Christmas time.

Councillor Mackrory confirmed that he would consider the information that the Cabinet Member had shared with him and decide whether or not he would proceed with the call in. In the meantime he requested that the background information he had been seeking be sent to him as soon as possible to assist him in his decision.

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Additional Information

In responses to further information sought by Councillor Mackrory who called in this decision, the following information has been provided.

(a) Email dated 7 February 2011 sent by Nick Blackall, Local Bus Planning Manager to Councillor Mackrory

'Further to this mornings meeting I am happy to pass on the information requested.

The potential net saving by not opening both sites on Saturdays would be in the region of £85,000 per annum. This has been is calculated by taking the reductions offered by the contractors for not operating on a Saturday, £147,000, and deducting the revenue taken, £62,000, giving a saving of £85,000 per year or £1635 per Saturday. An estimate has been made in respect of the income for Chelmer Valley and this estimate is based on the current usage at Sandon.

Customer surveys were undertaken between the 8th and 15th January. For the two Saturday's approximately 64% of users were aged over 55 and 53% travelled using a concessionary bus pass. 60% of customers used Park and Ride to go shopping and 9% to go to work. 35% of passengers used the service every Saturday 43% used it 2 to 3 times per month.

Further analysis of the customer surveys show that 63% of customers travel from postcodes in Maldon, Danbury, South Woodham, parts of Galleywood and Gt Baddow which are served by alternative bus services. The main comments made by customers were concern over the increase in traffic congestion / vehicle emissions and impact on trade in the town centre.

Chelmsford Borough Council has advised that there is sufficient capacity in town centre car parks on Saturdays to make up for the closure of Park and Ride.

The service has to adhere to the 56 day registration process and this time will have to be incorporated into the decision making timeframe. The estimated savings are calculated based on the sites being closed from the 1st April. The estimated net cost of running Park and Ride on Saturday's is £1634 per Saturday or £13,076 for the duration of a 56 day registration period.

I hope I have been able to answer the points raised this morning.'

(b) Email dated 9 February 2011 sent by Nick Blackall, Local Bus Planning Manager to Councillor Mackrory,

‘As I understand the situation as the decision has been called in we in effect cannot act on the proposal to withdraw the Saturday service.

In order to introduce the new service for Chelmer Valley when it opens on the 4th April the registration had to be submitted last week to comply with the 56 day notice. In anticipation of the decision being taken the service was registered to run Mondays to Fridays only. A registration was also submitted to alter the service to Sandon to operate Mondays to Fridays only. The view was taken that in the event that the decision was called in then it would only require a second registration to be submitted to reinstate the Saturday service to both sites.

As the decision has been called in the registration to re-instate the Saturday service at both sites without any interruption of provision, i.e. from the 9th April, now has to be posted tomorrow to ensure receipt at the Traffic Commissioner’s by the deadline on Friday.

Should the Scrutiny Committee decide on the 24th February to allow the decision to go through then a further registration will need to be submitted giving 56 days notice to withdraw the Saturday service. The earliest that the Saturday service would cease would be the 23rd April which is Easter Weekend.

If the Scrutiny Committee decide to uphold the call in then no further registration would be required.

As I said previously unless I hear otherwise by 0900 in the morning I will instruct the bus operator to post the registration in order to re-instate the Saturday service at both sites to ensure continuity of service. ‘

I hope that I have been able to explain the situation.’
