

NORTH ESSEX PARKING PARTNERSHIP JOINT COMMITTEE FOR ON-STREET PARKING

25 June 2020 at 1.00pm

**Online meeting, held on Zoom and broadcast via the
YouTube channel of Colchester Borough Council.**

Members Present:

Councillor Nigel Avey (Epping Forest District Council)
Councillor Michael Danvers (Harlow District Council)
Councillor Richard Van Dulken (Braintree District Council)
Councillor Deryk Eke (Uttlesford District Council)
Councillor Mike Lilley (Colchester Borough Council)
Councillor Robert Mitchell (Essex County Council) (Chairman)
Councillor Michael Talbot (Tendring District Council)

Substitutions:

None.

Apologies:

None.

Also Present:

Richard Walker (Parking Partnership)
Lou Belgrove (Parking Partnership)
Jason Butcher (Parking Partnership)
Liz Burr (Essex County Council)
Rory Doyle (Colchester Borough Council)
Qasim Durrani (Epping Forest District Council)
Jake England (Parking Partnership)
Linda Howells (Uttlesford District Council)
Hayley McGrath (Colchester Borough Council)
Samir Pandya (Braintree District Council)
Miroslav Sihelsky (Harlow Council)
Ian Taylor (Tendring District Council)
James Warwick (Epping Forest District Council)

60. Election of Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor Robert Mitchell (Essex County Council) be appointed Chairman of the North Essex Parking Partnership Joint Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

61. Election of Deputy Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor Mike Lilley (Colchester Borough Council) be appointed Deputy Chairman of the North Essex Parking Partnership Joint Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

62. Minutes

Councillor Eke queried the wording of the first and penultimate paragraphs of page three. Where the first paragraph stated that 'officers showed that payback would be possible from bids one and two,' Councillor Eke explained that he had made those comments. Regarding the penultimate paragraph, Councillor Eke challenged the statement that there was an understanding that additional work would then be carried out to provide additional details required.

The Chairman gave his view that the minutes represented a reasonable precis of the responses given to questions and discussion at the meeting. Richard Walker, Group Manager, clarified that the penultimate paragraph related to questions as to what payback certain proposed schemes would generate. Councillor Eke asked for his disagreement with the penultimate paragraph of page three to be put on record, specifically that he recalled no request for additional information relating to schemes seeking funding from Partnership reserves.

It was pointed out that a decision (as to whether to agree to the Partnership taking on responsibility for discretionary disabled parking bays) had been deferred to the Joint Parking Committee's March meeting, which had been cancelled due to the Covid-19 situation. A trial had also been agreed to test the efficacy of combining this work with that of the Partnership. The Group Manager explained that this work had been overtaken by the work necessary to respond to, and recover from, the effects of the pandemic and the subsequent lock down. The Chairman requested that this be provisionally scheduled for the following meeting of the Joint Parking Committee (JPC), should there be any work done on this and a report be possible on the subject at that meeting.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Joint Committee meeting held on 9 January 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

63. Annual Governance Review and Internal Audit

Hayley McGrath, Corporate Governance Manager for Colchester Borough Council, introduced and presented the Review and outcomes from the work of Internal Audit in 2019/20. It was confirmed that all systems and processes received 'full' or 'substantial' assurance ratings. Several awards had been won by

the NEPP, including for its annual report. The Corporate Governance Manager noted that the Covid-19 work had commenced just before the end of the year, and that a review of the efficacy of the Partnership's response would be carried out to identify any potential ways to improve processes.

The Internal Audit Review was summarised, and the two recommendations covered, one of which related to cash collection and the second which related to the consideration of complaints. The NEPP had also requested an additional audit to examine the back-office processes relating to parking charge notices.

A member of the Committee requested information as to how internal audits are treated by the external auditors of Colchester Borough Council and for their views to be given to the Committee. It was explained that the external auditors for the Council had access to all internal audit reports, and the internal auditors themselves, and could conduct auditing of any areas as they saw fit. It was noted that the Council had appointed a new firm of auditors, which would bring a new approach and conduct fresh auditing of the NEPP.

The Group Manager answered questions relating to the Partnership's policies, explaining that parking policies are brought to the Joint Parking Committee for updating, and that these would be brought to future meetings for approval, over successive meetings.

A member of the Committee expressed surprise that an issue concerning the payment of collected income to an incorrect local authority had not been mentioned. The Group Manager explained that this had been an issue relating to the collection and distribution of income relating to off-street parking by G4S, which had had errors in its payment to the local authorities in question. This had been identified as a systems failure, had been corrected and would be detailed in a review of off-street parking.

RESOLVED that the Committee had: -

- (a) Noted the Annual Governance Review of the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP), and;
- (b) Reviewed and commented on the Internal Audit report for the North Essex Parking Partnership.

64. Annual Review of Risk Management Report

Hayley McGrath, Corporate Governance Manager for Colchester Borough Council, introduced and explained the Joint Parking Committee's role in risk management and review. The Risk Management process had been signed off by both internal and external auditors, and any amendments to the Strategic Risk Register required the Committee's approval.

Three risks were recommended for removal as being insignificant as they were now seen as being part of 'business as usual.' A new risk relating to Covid-19 had been added, as this was seen as more appropriate than adding Covid-19

implications to a range of existing risks. A separate risk register relating to the virus was being worked up to record a range of risks stemming from Covid-19.

RESOLVED that the Joint Parking Committee: -

- (a) Endorsed the Risk Management Strategy for 2020/21; and
- (b) Agreed the Strategic Risk Register

65. Finance Report – End of year, reserves and proposed budget ‘20/21

Richard Walker, Group Manager, explained that the lockdown had resulted in a complete halt on operations by the NEPP. Members and Client Officers had been kept updated on work in progress, controls and planning efforts for the future.

Some reserves were in place, although the Covid-19 crisis had led to a worst-case scenario around three-times worse than what could have been expected under a ‘business as usual’ scenario. It was not expected that any surplus would be available for adding to the Partnership’s reserves this year, but it was expected that the existing reserves were sufficient to allow the projects previously agreed to go ahead, and to help cover the deficit caused by Covid-19.

In response to questions regarding permit prices, the Chairman reminded the Committee that these would be discussed in the following item.

The majority of the surplus income had come from pay and display schemes. The Chairman explained that there used to be a wide disparity in permit process across different areas, which had been evened-up to an extent, and that the flexibility of MiPermit has had benefits, e.g. in helping essential workers such as carers. The Committee discussed the possibilities and difficulties associated with localising different charging rates. The Group Manager noted that some areas were more conducive to enforcement operations than others, and that differentiated pricing between areas could be examined, however this would increase the cost of administrative operations at the NEPP. New data-led services were looking at ways to minimise enforcement costs and reduce pressure on the permit process. The use of digital permits had increased the system’s efficiency.

RESOLVED that the Joint Parking Committee: -

- (a) Noted the financial position at the end of 2019/20: –
 - from the in-year operation
 - of the current Parking Reserve position.
- (b) Approved the Parking Partnership budget for 2020/21.

66. Permit Prices 2021-2022

Richard Walker, Group Manager, welcomed the fact that the Partnership did not need to greatly increase prices, owing to the use of electronic processes to avoid

the need to send out paper permits. Only limited increases were proposed, as shown in the report. Prices for the first permit in a household were frozen, but where space is limited or an area oversubscribed, prices for additional permits were proposed to increase. The price for paper permits, such as visitor permits, was also recommended for an increase.

It was noted that all permits had been extended for three months, due to the Covid-19 situation. Resident Parking zones had not been enforced since the end of March, due to extensive working from home. The only enforcement carried out had been to ensure that emergency access is maintained.

A member of the Committee posited that any increase in tariffs would not be advisable, given the certainty that the UK was about to enter a bad recession. Second and visitor permits were widely used and the Committee member argued that the prices of these permits should not increase. The different situations regarding resident parking schemes across the different authorities were discussed and the Group Manager and Chairman summarised the problems which are mitigated by residential parking schemes. The Committee were then briefed on County Council work to improve safe transport links and alternative options to car use. The difficulties in tailoring approaches to different areas were explained.

The Committee discussed one member's recommendation that prices be left as they are and then reviewed next year. It was suggested that a price freeze could help individuals and businesses to return to normal, and that a likely increase in unemployment would make an increase in prices unpalatable. Another suggestion was for a full review of permits, including the reasons as to why each residential parking zone had been instituted, and their maintenance and enforcement.

The Chairman requested a report be circulated to Committee members on the likely effects of changes to permit prices, once it became possible to identify the effects of the Covid-19 crisis. Committee members stressed the need for central government pressure to decrease the number of cars in use, and further work by the County Council to improve and expand on alternative transport methods and infrastructure. The sensitive approach to enforcement taken by the Parking Partnership was praised.

RESOLVED that Residential Parking Permit prices be frozen at this time.

67. NEPP Annual Report Data for 2019/20

The Group Manager informed the Committee that travel statistics for the period up to mid-June were to be released that day and would soon be available. Data on PCN had to be left out as the reporting concentrated on alterations to service necessitated by the Covid-19 situation.

The Partnership had again been nominated for awards this year, and a video report had been produced, continuing efforts to present the NEPP's work in a more accessible style.

RESOLVED that the Joint Parking Committee noted the data and details provided.

68. Restrictions, Junctions and ParkSafe School Zones for 3PR support

Richard Walker, Group Manager, explained that efforts were being made to simplify the process for introducing new schemes and detailed the approach taken and the current process and problems encountered. It was proposed that a new tier four category be introduced for schemes, bypassing the annual limit of six schemes per district or borough. A member questioned how much involvement the local authorities could have in designing each scheme and avoid problems from the summary application of red line routes.

The Group Manager informed the Committee that the NEPP were looking to put in measures to augment 3PR and safety schemes. Enforcement of schemes requires two officers to attend, and with the current 41 officers in total and over 300 schools, universal coverage is impossible. Use of cameras for enforcement is therefore a major positive. The primary approach would continue to be to encourage behavioural change where possible, and to only conduct enforcement operations against those who refuse to change their actions. It was noted that Covid-19 may necessitate a greater use of staggered drop-off and collection times. The Group Manager promised to ensure that local councillors and officers are asked for input when new measures are considered.

RESOLVED that: -

- (a) The Parking Partnership adopt a new fourth tier category and process for 'ParkSafe' restrictions where expediency is required, beside the existing processes, set out in paragraph 3.2.
- (b) The Joint Parking Committee notes that the existing delegation set out at paragraph 5.4 allows the NEPP to and help expedite these and free up slots in the fifth tier.
- (c) The Joint Parking Committee notes the progress with the 3PR educational scheme and the process for additional support set out within the report.

69. NEPP Surplus Fund – Project Progress Reports

Richard Walker, Group Manager, estimated that the Covid-19 crisis could cost the Partnership around £500k, depending on outcomes. Officers are looking at whether there is a need to review projects and their timetables, such as the siting of school cameras. These have progressed, where possible, working closely with client officers and keeping apprised of changes in road usage patterns. The 'Road to Recovery' document [relating to the recovery from the effects of Covid-19-related behaviour changes] would be circulated to all members of the Joint Parking Committee. Jason Butcher, Parking Project Manager, explained that most client officers had indicated that they wish for their areas' projects to go ahead. Regarding the St John's Road Sport Centre project in Epping Forest, this was being examined as to whether there was still a requirement for the scheme.

Councillor Deryk Eke noted that much information had been provided by Uttlesford District Council relating to its proposals for car park extensions. Officers were asked what else would be needed before these proposals could go forward. The Group Manager apologised that the response operations to Covid-19 had taken precedence in the past months. It was confirmed that these were still works in progress and that confirmation would be given as to whether any further information would be needed for any of the projects from the partner authority of the area.

In response to questions, the Group Manager explained the situation regarding the Manor Road project in Colchester. This project would turn a small area of waste ground into resident parking and include a bay for an electric vehicle. The site was near a multi-storey carpark but would not be attached to it or used by it.

It was noted that sensor use had been slightly delayed as Section 50 [New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 (NRSWA)] works licenses would have been needed to install these into the roadway and parking bays. The County Council would now buy sensors using funds from the Parking Partnership. Issues have been resolved and Section 50 works licenses would not be needed for installation of these sensors, as they would be owned by the County Council itself. The importance of the sensors and use of data was stressed in efforts to better manage and direct parking.

RESOLVED that the Joint Parking Committee noted the progress reports in Appendix 1 of the report.

70. NEPP Agreement - Park & Ride Report

Richard Walker, Group Manager, noted the work already carried out with the Park and Ride scheme in Colchester, and work done to encourage different transport options, especially whilst public transport restrictions are in operation. The introduction of the MiPermit system for the Park and Ride carpark was outlined. One option under consideration by the Borough Council was to use a carpark on the edge of the Town centre for parking, with visitors then walking/cycling/scootering to the Town centre. This would be part of a raft of policies to reduce congestion. One possibility would be for the car park at the Council's Rowan House offices to be used for this purpose. The Group Manager stated that the Park and Ride partnership, including any patrols, would be expected to break even.

RESOLVED that the Joint Parking Committee approve the formalization of the Partnership with Park & Ride adding it into the current Agreement, for the purpose of patrolling and including MiPermit ticketing.

71. NEPP beyond 2022 - Strategic Positioning Report

Richard Walker, Group Manager, outlined the detailed discussions held with client officers as to how best to proceed with proposals for the future. The Recommended model to propose was shown at Appendix A. Permission was now sought to write to propose this model to the South Essex Parking

Partnership and Essex County Council, as detailed at 1.1 of the report. It was explained why a £300k financial buffer was proposed and noted that the parking service's deficit used to be £900k per year, prior to the formation of the Parking Partnerships. It was agreed that the current system had worked well and been a success.

It was highlighted that one of the original issues of contention for the Parking Partnership had been that any losses/deficit would be shared between the participating local authorities, although the Partnership had avoided problems relating to this as it had swiftly improved the financial position and avoided any deficit being generated. This would need to be discussed, if a new model proposed would see surplus funds transferred to the County Council.

Different options were discussed by the Committee, including the potential for returning some surplus funds to the County Council, in return for taking on other duties, as shown in Appendix A. The model shown at Appendix A was explained, and the Committee was informed that, if the model was agreed, there would be around 18 months in which the details could be worked out.

A Committee member asked whether consideration had been given to extending the Parking Partnership to cover Southern Suffolk. The Group Manager informed the Committee that he had talked to Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils about this and had already provided consultancy services in that area, advising on the introduction of civil enforcement. Other authorities have also been talked to regarding potential ways to synergise working and ways for the NEPP to provide consultancy services.

RESOLVED that the Joint Parking Committee: -

- (a) Asks the County Council and SEPP to continue with the Partnership model after the current Agreement, passing a reserve a buffer of £300k formed from current Reserve and Cashflow sums into the new NEPP service.
- (b) Decided the future operating model and assignment of functions – to continue to adopt additional services, but with a more flexible arrangement to deal with any surplus.

72. Obstructive Parking update

The Committee was informed that no further work had been done by the Department for Transport on the issue of obstructive parking, due to the Covid-19 crisis. It was expected that consultation data will be looked at in the Summer and considered in Autumn. The general options were summarised, including a simplified process for introducing restrictions, decriminalisation of obstructive parking (allowing civil enforcement officers to patrol) and possibly the banning of all footway parking, although this last option was not expected and could be very problematic. More information was expected for the Joint Parking Committee meeting scheduled for October 2020. It was noted that Councillor Michael

Danvers had not been part of the Committee when this issue was discussed in depth in October 2019, and officers would provide a link to the meeting minutes for him.

73. Forward Plan 2020-21

The Chairman summarised the main items noted for each meeting in the Plan. It was asked whether hybrid meetings would be possible in the future, to allow for remote attendance for those who could not attend in person, whilst other members did attend in person. These provisions were not in place yet, although assurance was given that Colchester Borough Council, which provided organisational support and arranged Joint Committee meetings, would look at possible options for this.

The Joint Parking Committee expressed its thanks to the Partnership's officers for their work in responding to Covid-19 and working on recovery actions.

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan 2020-21 be approved.