

## **An update on parking in Southwold – December 2017**

### **The current situation**

At present there is no strategy for parking in Southwold, resulting in uncoordinated provision. Parking close to the centre of the Town does not turnover frequently enough, which is detrimental to the economy of the High Street and to businesses. The larger car parks are at the periphery of the Town and may not be as convenient for residents, workers, shoppers, the elderly and the disabled, and those wishing to pop into the shops. Pressure to park in the Town at peak periods is intense, resulting in significant anti-social parking. Signage is poor, causing visitors to drive around the Town to find a suitable place to park.

Improving accessibility and parking is a key strategy in Southwold Town Council's vision for the future of the Town, published in 2016. Lack of a co-ordinated plan diminishes the attractiveness of the Town for residents, businesses and visitors, and jeopardises the Town Council ambition for a vibrant future for the Town. Parking is a sensitive issue. We realise that we won't please everybody, but we are determined to achieve better management of parking in the Town. To this end we have been working with Local Authorities on a way forward.

### **Capacity**

Southwold now has a total of about 4,000 car parking spaces, some 2,000 of which are road-side, free of charge, and largely confined to the built-up area. The remaining 2,000 are off-road car parks.

The demand for car parking spaces by residents, second home owners and holiday-lets is about 2,000 which leaves around 2,000 spaces available for delivery trucks, maintenance vans, day-visitors (including shoppers) and people working in town but who live outside Southwold.

In numbers, this seems adequate provision, but it is not always in the right place. Waveney District Council is considering extending their Pier Car Park northwards which will significantly increase the size of the Pier car park. Southwold Primary School is also considering the opportunity to open its playground at weekends and school holidays. Plans are being considered by Millennium Trust to develop a car park on the land opposite the Millennium Hall which could be open to the public full-time. Other than these, the only undeveloped space in Southwold that is safe from inundation is Southwold Common – which the Trustees of the Common have a duty to protect.

### **Considerations for the future**

Against this background, Southwold Town Council, Southwold Common Trust, Suffolk County Council, Waveney District Council, and Suffolk Police Authority have spent considerable time and effort over the past two years trying to get a better understanding of the problems and potentially viable solutions. The consensus amongst the stakeholders is that the parking problems could be aided by better management of the existing parking spaces. Amongst the options being investigated are:

Improved directional and informative road signs. A combination of signage that clearly points out the location of car parks and the amenities in proximity to them around town and, perhaps, the availability of spaces in each car park being displayed on a real-time indicator sign at the entrance to Southwold, will help with this problem.

Smart car park meters in the paid car parks that allow drivers to book parking spaces in advance on-line by mobile phone, backed up with a web-based information system showing locations and charges.

Encouraging holiday letting agencies to include maps in their brochures showing the location of car parks around town with links to an on-line advance booking system, if it can be developed.

The introduction of a tiered parking charge structure for long and short-term charges, with lower charges for Long Stay out of town car parks, and higher charges for Short Stay car parks situated nearer to the Town Centre. This requires agreement between the owners of the various car parks. Some of these spaces may be reserved for permit holders, such as those using the car parks on a regular basis, such as workers, that could possibly be purchased at a reduced tariff, subject to agreement with the stakeholders.

The consideration of a roadside parking permit system for residents'. Those who do qualify may be permitted to park in nominated spaces on the road side (Residents Parking Scheme - managed by the County or District Authorities). However, the statutory procedures and consultations involved in setting up a residents parking scheme at the road side takes considerable expense and time (up to two years), and the permit cost needs to be established.

To ensure a turnover of parking spaces close to the centre of the Town, the introduction of parking charges is being considered for the currently free of charge Godyll Road car park, operated by Southwold Town Council, and also for verge side parking on Gardner and York Roads, operated by Southwold Common Trust. Charges, which have yet to be determined, would be necessary to cover the cost of upgrading these car park areas and managing and enforcing the parking thereon.

Another possibility under consideration is the introduction of either, or both, an out of town park and ride service, and/or a shuttle bus service between the centre of town and the peripheral long stay car parks. Such schemes could be promoted by employers and holiday-let agencies.

Finally, consideration is being given to ways, and facilities, to encourage walking and cycling around the Town. This consideration is at an embryonic stage, but will focus on things like better signposting of safe pedestrian and cycle routes, the development of more safe cycle routes, particularly between Reydon and Southwold to provide alternative routes avoiding the busy Mights Bridge, the provision of more strategically placed cycle racks, and a publicity campaign to encourage use of muscles rather than motors.

## **Implementation**

The number of agencies, partners and stakeholders involved in, or responsible for, these options means that co-operation among them will be essential to put new initiatives in place. Given a choice, most people faced with an option of either free or charged parking, will understandably opt for the former.

Ideally, we would create a holistic solution, with different elements implemented at the same time, but this is not possible because of the time it would take to create a residents parking scheme should one be implementable. The Council is aware that charging in previously free car parks will create additional pressure on on-street parking places and could lead to more anti-social parking and could make it more difficult for residents and employees to find parking spaces in the short term.

One barrier to creating a solution that can be implemented immediately is the forthcoming introduction of Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) legislation for Suffolk. This will mean that the responsibility for enforcing roadside parking regulations will be transferred from the Police to County/District Authorities, and infringements will become Civil rather than Criminal. It is uncertain when this will happen, but probably within the next two or three years. Until that time, on street parking offences may only be enforced by the police, which means that the Town Council must fully fund the Police Community Support Officer, to ensure that enforcement takes place.

Discussions between, and investigations by, the various stakeholders continue, but definitive conclusions have yet to be reached. Engagement will of course continue to take place with residents and those who use their cars to come to Southwold, and the Town Council welcomes feedback from the community.

Feedback can be sent to the Town Clerk at Southwold Town Hall, Market Place, Southwold or by e mail to [HYPERLINK "mailto:townclerk@southwoldtowncouncil.com"](mailto:townclerk@southwoldtowncouncil.com)

[townclerk@southwoldtowncouncil.com](mailto:townclerk@southwoldtowncouncil.com)

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