

Minutes

Economic Scrutiny Panel

10th July, 2007, Belmont Community Centre

Present: Councillor Hopgood (in the Chair)
and Councillors Bartle, Guy, Colledge, Kelly, Lightley, Marsden, Simmons and
Stoddart

Also Present: Mrs Diane Prested
Mr Colin Wilkes Managing Director Durham Markets Company
Mr Richard Toynbee Manger Prince Bishop's Shopping Centre
Councillors: Kellett, Thomson and Thompson.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Simpson and Wilkes.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 13th June, 2007 were agreed as a true record.

3. Scrutiny of Disabled Parking in the District

Mrs Diane Prested a member of the public who is disabled agreed to attend the Panel meeting to give a disabled person's perspective on disabled parking. Mrs Prested advised the Panel that the parking spaces were wider to allow room for wheel chairs to get in and out of vehicles, especially electric wheelchairs. Mrs Prested informed the Panel that she usually came into Durham on the Access bus which collects disabled people from their homes and drops them off in the Market Place. However, there is a problem accessing the Market Place paved area as the dropped kerb is usually blocked by vehicles parking either directly in front of the access or not leaving enough room to manoeuvre.

Councillor Peter Thompson suggested that the wardens/police should be informed of the day and time of the access bus to ensure that the dropped kerb area was free from vehicles at this time.

Mrs Prested also advised the Panel that it was common in supermarket car parks to find the designated spaces taken by able bodied people.

Councillor Les Thomson, City Council representative on Access for All advised the Panel of an occasion when he had visited Tesco with a disabled person in their vehicle and there had been no disabled parking spaces available as vehicles not displaying blue badges had parked in the bays and that he had informed Tesco of the abuse. Tesco had placed notices on the windows of the offending vehicles.

The Chair reiterated that some local authorities and supermarkets had started to use the Baywatch scheme, which was basically a sticker placed on the window of an offending vehicle advising that the registration may have been taken.

Mr Toynbee advised the Panel that Sainsbury's supermarket took registration numbers of vehicles parked in disabled bays that were not displaying the blue badges and announced the numbers in the store.

The Chair asked Mr Toynbee as Manager of Prince Bishops Shopping Centre what measures his staff took when they noticed cars parked in disabled spaces without displaying a blue badge. Mr Toynbee advised that his staff monitored the designated disabled parking area and any vehicles not displaying blue badges had notices put on their windscreens.

Mr Wilkes of Durham Markets Company advised the Panel that retailers wanted accessible parking for disabled customers to encourage trade. He suggested that some of the park and ride bus stops still left disabled visitors with a very steep climb before they got into the Market Place. He also advised that there was abuse of parking at back Silver Street, where blue badge holders park their vehicles and then proceed to run up the Market Hall steps!

Councillor Les Thomson informed Members that there was abuse of the blue badge scheme and that the following cases had been highlighted;
A blue badge holder comes to town with an able bodied person, the badge holder parks the car and the able bodied person then leaves the disabled person in the vehicle while they do their shopping.

Badges of deceased badge holders are in circulation and are being used.

There is a black market for blue badges making hundreds of pounds for unscrupulous dealers.

The Chair advised members of a leaflet she had picked up from Shopmobility which detailed their services including their minibus services that picked disabled people up from home and would bring them into Durham Shopmobility unit or another location of the person's choice within a radius of Durham.

Mrs Prested advised members that the staff at Shopmobility were very helpful.

The Panel agreed that publicity was the key, and that there could be people unable to leave their homes that had no idea of the services on offer. The Chair suggested that information leaflets should be included with the blue badge packs and be displayed at the park and ride, tourist information centre and in all disabled toilets within the city. It was also suggested that shopmobility be publicised in Durham City News.

The Chair also suggested that Doctor's Surgeries and Health Centres should publicise the benefits of the Access bus and the Shopmobility bus.

Mrs Prested advised the Panel that there were problems finding wheelchair taxi's, especially on a Sunday.

The Chair thanked Mr. Wilkes, Mr Toynbee and Mrs Prested for their attendance and the information they had given to the Panel.

4. Any Other Business

The Chair informed Members that Danny Harland of the County Council's traffic division would be in attendance for the next meeting and if Members had any questions could they inform Democratic Support by the end of July.

The Chair asked Mrs Prested if she was available to attend the next panel meeting.

The Meeting terminated at 6.20 p.m.

Draft Report of Economic Scrutiny Panel

Scrutiny of Disabled Parking within City of Durham District

1. Background

The Economic Scrutiny Panel was tasked with scrutinising the available provision of disabled parking within the district.

Members had noted that there was a problem with able bodied drivers parking in disabled designated spaces; however, this mostly happens on privately owned land.

The Panel wished to explore how to discourage able bodied people from using specially designated spaces for disabled people.

2. Aims & Objectives

It was the objective of the Panel to discover the following:-

- What facilities are currently available
- Are current facilities adequate
- What are the future needs
- Focus on disabled parking within the District and aim to improve
- How the Council can work with other organisations to improve current situation

3. Findings

The current parking facilities for Disabled Drivers in Durham City are as follows:-

City of Durham Council Car Parks – 2 Disabled Parking Spaces

Park & Ride

| | |
|-------------|-----------|
| Belmont – | 12 Spaces |
| Sniperely – | 5 Spaces |
| Howlands – | 6 Spaces |

There are several private car parks within the City that have dedicated disabled parking spaces. Also, the out of town retail parks at the Arniston Centre and Dragonville have a large number of disabled parking spaces. Superstores in the district also provide disabled parking spaces.

However, inconsiderate parking of able-bodied people in disabled bays can only be enforced by the private land owners on their land. Some private car parks display notices warning of wheel clamping but this is directed at any unauthorised parking.

The Disability Now, the Disabled Drivers' Association, Disabled Drivers' Motor Club and British Polio Fellowship are campaigning to end the abuse of disabled parking bays by non-disabled people. The Baywatch Campaign aims to improve public

awareness of the misuse of designated disabled bays and encouraging drivers not use disabled bays unless they are a valid blue badge holder. The Campaign has the backing of the Minister for the Disabled and many disabled organisations together with major grocery retailers.

The Baywatch Campaign has gained interest from many high street supermarkets, motoring organisations and some local authorities.

Disabled drivers who display the Blue Badge are entitled to free on street parking. In fee paying car parks disabled drivers whilst having designated spaces are expected to pay unless otherwise stated.

A disabled lady came along to a panel meeting and Panel Members an insight into problems she encounters regularly. The most common problem encountered is able bodied people parking in designated disabled spaces. Also there are problems for wheel chair users when people inconsiderately park their vehicles in front of dropped kerbs thus making it difficult if not impossible to reach their destination.

The Manager of Prince Bishop's Shopping Centre and the Managing Director of Durham City Markets Company agreed with Panel Members that Shopmobility should receive more publicity. The Managing Director of Durham Market Company advised Member of abuse of the blue badge scheme in parking bays to the rear of the Market Hall.

4. Outcomes

Access for All provide a bus that takes disabled people on shopping trips to various locations which otherwise they would find difficult. Shopmobility offers a service for a nominal fee, of collecting disabled shoppers from their homes and drops them off at the shopmobility centre in Durham where scooters have been prebooked for them

That more publicity should be given to organisations such as *Access for All* and *Shopmobility* to promote the good work they do which is a benefit to the City. Thus encouraging disabled people into the city centre which otherwise may have been inaccessible to them.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 That Durham City Council monitor its public car parks and alert drivers who have parked their vehicles in a designated disabled parking bay
- 5.2 That Durham City Council publicly support the Baywatch Scheme to stop abuse of designated disabled parking spaces
- 5.3 To encourage Durham County Council to include in their Blue Badge Packs information about Access to All and Shopmobility.
- 5.3 To urge Durham County Council, Health Centres and Doctors' Surgeries to display Access to All guide and Shopmobility leaflets at their waiting areas (Park and Ride)

- 5.4 To urge that Community Police or Traffic Wardens are available to ensure that the loading bay dropped kerb area of the Market Place is clear for drop off and pick up of the monthly Access Bus.