

## **Response from Berwick Civic Society to the AECOM report "Berwick upon Tweed, Parking Study"**

Berwick-upon-Tweed Civic Society welcomes the initiative by NCC to record and assess the current status of parking provision in the town. It is noted that the survey focuses on the historic centre within the walls and adjacent areas and that a factor behind the study is the uncertainty about the future availability of the 141 spaces provided in summer by the Castlegate overflow car park. This is the first time such quantitative evidence has been provided and the use of industry standard measures of occupancy and demand is understood.

The NCC Core Strategy in place at the time the study was commissioned has of course been withdrawn by the new NCC administration so the anticipated number of new houses (900: para. 4.2.1.) is itself in doubt. More importantly, none of the consultees refers to the proposal to redevelop the Barracks as a 'heritage hub' with ambitions to increase the number of visitors annually from ca 10,000 to 50,000.

Overall, the implications of further housing growth, (as stated in para. 6) require more than a short-term increase in parking provision within the town centre. This consultation should therefore look to solutions not for the extra 50 spaces needed coming summer or 187 by 2020, two years, but towards a sustainable solution for parking needs in 2030 (para. 7.2.1).

The Society is aware of conflicting views within the town in favour of more, or less, provision for parking for residents, those working in the town, those using shops and services located within the walls, and visitors. The Society is mindful that parking in the town is used not only by residents of Berwick, Tweedmouth and Spittal: the town acts as a centre for services for residents within a significant radius in all directions.

It is the Society's belief that a vibrant town centre economy will support the maintenance and regeneration of the historic built environment of Berwick. Measures on parking which harm the economy, including any restriction of existing parking without the provision of alternative solutions, would not be welcomed. On the other hand, Berwick already possesses a network of buses and anecdotal evidence suggests that the provision of free all-day parking in the town meant a change of the method of transport by town centre workers *from* buses *to* cars. We also note that the viability of public transport within the town (e.g. the Hoppa Bus) is under threat and would not so encourage any parking measures that reduced its use.

Overall, the Civic Society recognises the need for a year-round solution and is conscious that the loudest recent debate has centred only on coach parking and summer visitors.

We have read the report and note the estimates of the growth in traffic over the coming years and the suggested locations whereby increased parking spaces could be provided within the walled town, which it should be noted is a conservation area. We question whether such an approach is appropriate in this day and age given that the UK Government's National Policy Planning Framework states that:

*‘The transport system needs to be balanced in favour of sustainable transport modes, giving people a real choice about how they travel.’*

*‘Encouragement should be given to solutions which support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and reduce congestion.’*

Neither of these major social and environmental issues is addressed by the proposals that envisage increased car parking and additional penetration of the town centre by more vehicles. We also note that a number of the locations suggested in para. 7 are already excluded by development (7.2.9, 7.2.13), leaving a smaller number of locations. None of these should be selected as ‘Hobson’s choice’, the only space available, without proper consideration of the impact of parking on them.

The Civic Society recognises the evidence for the adverse impact of global warming due to greenhouse gas emissions and accept that it is incumbent on every community to adopt transport policies that seek to reduce car use and to introduce initiatives that allow and encourage a shift from private car to more sustainable modes such as public transport, walking and cycling (although we also recognise the limitations that the town’s physical geography place on the last two methods).

In addition, the Civic Society has to represent the views not only of car drivers but also of residents, cyclists, people with disabilities and others who need equal access to the town. Indeed, the creation of additional on-street parking may well make progress along streets with a pram or wheelchair more difficult by reducing pavement widths and introducing obstructions.

Taking these various ethical considerations into mind leads us to the following comments:

1. We do not support a significant increase (i.e. the use for parking of empty ground not currently or previously so used) in the area given over to parking within the old town as it will lead to more congestion and further degrade the town's appearance with streets lined with cars as well as causing deterioration in air quality and contributing to more greenhouse gas emissions.
2. Solutions that cause the movement of more traffic through the town are especially unwelcome. Whilst the newly opened spaces in Hatter’s Lane and (shortly) Chapel Street are relatively peripheral, and close to the main routes into town, the Quayside is at the farthest point in the town and the exit from it through the narrowest street (Bridge Street) or via the junction at the top of Hide Hill.
3. The report does not debate the benefits of using empty land for parking versus the benefits to the town economy that would follow from development of the same sites for housing, retail or mixed use. Or indeed, from reduction of parking in unsuitable or hard-of-access areas and the re-use of that space.

4. We would however strongly support the report's Park & Ride option described under S.7.2.23 and favour the creation of P&R facilities on the north and south approaches to Berwick as this will keep much traffic out of the centre and encourage use of existing public transport provision. A Park & Ride system could perhaps operate at peak times, and/or during the summer months only to cater for the influx of visitors and may not be required off-peak. We recognise that initially the costs of a P&R scheme may outweigh the benefits but this has to be viewed as a long-term investment in the town.
5. The policy of free parking and the complex variety of different times needs to be reviewed to encourage the use of public transport, whether or not a Park & Ride scheme is established. One option could be free in-town parking for two hours to allow shopping trips then a charge for longer visits. It is a common belief that the parking problem has got worse since charges were removed so more lateral thinking is required on this issue.
6. More effective enforcement is required of whatever parking arrangements are agreed.

Yours sincerely

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(Report prepared by the Planning & Development Sub-Committee)