

Transport

This section has been written and reviewed by Stratford's Transport & Parking Group¹. It is not exhaustive and covers: (i) parking in the town; (ii) resident's parking; (iii) upgrading the town's railway stations; (iv) proposed re-instatement of the Honeybourne rail link; (v) improving town centre streets and signage; (vi) providing a new bus station and southern P&R facility; (vii) improving the local road network; and (viii) replacing Lucy's Mill Bridge².

Parking in the Town

The Group's approach was guided by four main principles:

- Parking spaces are a scarce resource so that their role (on-street, off-street and Park & Ride) should be clear and supported by the tariff structure, naming, on-street signage and SDC's web page.
- The tariff structure should be reasonably in line with private car parks in the town and the town's main competitors (e.g., Leamington, Warwick, Touchwood, etc.).
- Changes to the tariff structure should attempt to be revenue neutral.
- Car parking provided by SDC is a commercial service and all car parks in the District should aim to at least cover their costs.

The practical work on parking was guided by a major survey, carried out by Stratford during 2010. It looked at commuter parking in the town, together with parking for residents and visitors using the town centre (mainly shoppers). The results of the survey were extensively discussed by a Working Group set up by SDC. After this discussion – informed by a car park model developed by a member of the Group – the Group prepared a document which made several recommendations.

The main ones included: (i) to avoid confusion, all car parks in the town, should have the same tariff; (ii) to encourage night time users to visit earlier and to park off-street, rather than on-street (particularly in Residents Parking zones), the evening charge in all car parks should be lowered and it should commence earlier (e.g., at 4 or 5pm); (iii) to encourage visitors to spend longer in the town, a lower 8-hour rate should be introduced; (iv) to encourage longer over-night stays, the 24-hour rate should be lowered and a new 72-hour rate introduced; (v) to encourage coaches to use the coach park and stay longer in the town, the coach parking tariff should be simplified; and (vi) to ensure residents know they are entitled to a discount of 20% in all pay-and-display car parks, the Stratford Card should be actively promoted (SDC's 2011 survey showed that only 11% of respondents knew about the Stratford Card).

¹ The Group was set up by the Stratford Society and Stratford. *Members include: Ian Heggie (SS, Chairman), Chris Gregory (Stratford, Vice Chairman), Cllr Jenny Fradgley (SS, Secretary), Neil Basnett (Chairman of Stratford), Roger Bennett (WCC currently on sick leave), Julie Crawshaw (WCC temporarily replacing Roger Bennett), Roger Davis (SS), Elizabeth Dixon (Accessible Stratford and SS), Cllr Keith Lloyd (STC and SDC), Martyn Luscombe (Stratford Voice), Cllr Kate Rolfe (SDC and WCC), Robin Sankey (SS), Pat Whitehouse (Retail) and Yvette Widowfield (SDC).*

² The Group's work is reported on the Stratford Society's web page at www.stratfordsociety.co.uk.

The only contentious recommendation related to the current 1-hour free parking in Bridgefoot and Unicorn Meadow. The Stratforward survey showed that the ½ hour parking restriction in Bridge, Union and High Streets was no longer fit-for-purpose. Residents and visitors simply cannot complete their personal business in 30 minutes. As a result, WCC has tentatively agreed to convert the ½ hour into a 1-hour restriction. This undermines the value of the current 1-hour free parking in Bridgefoot and Unicorn Meadow (equivalent to 30-40 minutes free when you allow for the time taken to walk to and from the car park and the shops). This probably explains why SDC's 2011 Parking Survey showed that only 16% of respondents overall made use of the 1-hour free period. The Group therefore recommended that the free one hour period should be abolished and the extra revenue raised used to benefit residents in other ways (e.g., by promoting the Stratford Card, lowering the evening tariff to discourage parking in resident's parking zones, etc.).

The proposed new tariff structure – for all car parks in the town -- is shown below. It is simple, reasonably consistent, has a neutral impact on the SDC budget and compares well with other tariffs in the town and tariffs in competitor towns like Touchwood, Leamington and Warwick.

	up to 20/30m	up to 1 hr	up to 2 hr	up to 3 hr	up to 4 hr	up to 6 hr	up to 8 hr	up to 12 hr	24 hr	evg only	72 hr
Existing	free	0.80	1.60	2.70	4.00	6.00	-	10.00	20.00	3.00	-
Proposed	free	0.80	1.80	3.00	4.00	-	5.00	10.00	15.00	1.50	20.00

Other recommendations made by the Working Group included (i) naming and branding car parks to ensure motorists approaching the town could find them on a map (where is Unicorn Meadow?) and could be easily directed to the nearest parking spaces; and (ii) upgrading the SDC web site to show all car parks – both public and private – together with their charging regimes.

The Stratforward survey also looked at Park & Ride. Currently, the last shuttle bus leaves Bridge Street just after 7.0 pm (which means leaving your place of work by 6.45 pm to catch the bus) and the gate is locked at 7.30 pm (after which a fine is payable to get your car released). It was therefore no surprise that only about 6% of commuters in the survey used P&R. However, those that did – staff who regularly finish work before about 6.30 pm -- found the service convenient and of high quality. Park & Ride could thus be made more attractive for commuters – particularly those who regularly work late, or cannot leave the office before 6.30 pm -- by extending the opening hours. WCC responded positively to Stratforward's suggestions and, on 28 May, the operating hours were extended from 7.0 pm to 11.30 pm.

Finally, there is the issue of fairness – are parking charges in Stratford fair and equitable? SDC has 22 off-street car parks, ten of which are in Stratford. Only one of the 12 outside Stratford levies charges – a mere 20p for one hour and 40p for two hours, resulting in substantial losses. In Stratford, on the other hand, parking charges are high – typically 80p for one hour and £1.60 for 2 hours, which results in a profit of approximately £640,000 per year. The loss from off-street parking outside Stratford, on the other hand, is £270,000. Parking is not a social service and the least tax payers expect is that SDC car parks should cover their costs – either by levying a small charge, leasing the car park to the Parish Council at cost, or re-developing the site.

Resident's Parking

In 2010, the Town Council also carried out an extensive survey of resident's parking in the town, which expressed serious concerns about on-street parking in the town's residential areas. It showed that 72% of resident's and 77% of visitors could not park easily in their parking zone, with most difficulty experienced during the early evening. WCC responded to these findings by commissioning their own study of resident's parking throughout the District. However, based on the results of the Town Council survey, resident's have been suggesting that: (i) commuter parking in residential areas should be discouraged by extending current parking restrictions (e.g., by widening resident's parking zones); (ii) the hours when restrictions apply should be extended from 6.00 pm to 7.30pm, or later; (iii) reducing the time (currently 3 hours) when non-residents can park during the day; and (iv) reviewing whether second and third permits issued for the same address should cost more.

More controversially, many of those residents who regularly visit London, would like to see current visitor permits replaced by the scratch card system widely used by London boroughs. The system would discourage the current "black market" in visitor permits. The scratch cards could be trialled in a demonstration project and then potentially rolled out if residents voted in favour of the system.

Upgrading the Town's Railway Stations

The Group worked jointly with the Town Council when reviewing the proposal to build a new Stratford Parkway station at Bishopton. The Group had several reservations about the proposals. Many were of a technical nature and related to the traffic forecasts, lack of recognition that many of the current passengers are students travelling on low-cost fares and there were concerns about the way the costs had been prepared. However, the Group's main concern that an un-manned station would not be DDA compliant (hence neither of the town's two stations would be able to properly accommodate passengers with disabilities) and that the Parkway station may result in the eventual closure of the exiting town station. The Group likewise did not accept WCC's claim that additional car parking could not be provided at -- or close to -- the existing town station.

However, in December 2011, the government announced that the DfT had approved funding from its Access for All scheme (which aims to improve access to stations) for a new footbridge at Stratford town station which would meet the needs of all users and be DDA compliant. The scheme will cost around £1.23 million and the DfT will finance £1 million of this cost. The balance is expected to be raised from developer contributions (Section 106 payments). The Group welcomed this news. First, it means that at least one of the town's two stations will be user-friendly, (i.e., DDA compliant), it will make the town station more attractive to rail travellers and this, in turn, will make it more likely that the town station will remain open.

Proposed Reinstatement of the Honeybourne Rail Line

The last major study of this project was carried out in 1996 by consultants, Halcrow Fox. It was a low-cost scheme (capital cost about £10 million), involving a level

crossing at the Evesham Road roundabout, a new track fitted alongside the first section of Seven Meadows Road (now complicated by the construction of Wetherby Way), followed by a rail track flanked by weldmesh security fencing running along the Greenway. However, in spite of being low cost, the scheme was expected to incur an annual operating deficit of over £500,000.

An organisation called the Rail Transport Group produced another report in 2007 arguing for re-instatement of the Honeybourne link, but presented little hard evidence to support the scheme. A year later, John Deegan (WCC's former Head of Strategy & Economic Development), proposed re-instatement of the Honeybourne link using a low emission tram/train system. The vehicle would operate as a train along the re-instated rail right-of-way along the Greenway but, once it reached the Greenway car park, it would operate like a regular bus along the public highway to Stratford station. Such vehicles are common in Germany and a pilot tram/train is currently being implemented between Sheffield and Rotherham.

The Shakespeare Line Promotion Group have recently put forward a new proposal for consideration by WCC. This differs somewhat from the Halcrow Fox proposal, in that they suggest re-instating the old rail line in a cutting and taking it under both Evesham Road roundabout and Wetherby Way in a tunnel. Capital costs are roughly estimated at £20-30 million, but no figures are presented for operating costs and hence the required annual subsidy. The Group were therefore concerned that the scheme would be significantly less economically viable than the Halcrow Fox scheme, while the dive-under bridges and cuttings would create serious technical problems in the vicinity of Sanctus Road bridge.

In spite of the above reservations, the Group nevertheless suggested that WCC should not automatically dismiss such proposals and should remain open minded about the possibility of eventually reinstating the rail link. However, no scheme should be implemented unless it could demonstrate a positive business case. Without that, no government grants would be available to finance capital costs and, since rail services have to be let as negative concessions, WCC would have to cover the required annual subsidy.

Town Centre Streets and Signage

Stratford's streets are cluttered with signs and lines and are congested by both traffic and delivery vehicles. Although the town has an attractive heritage – particularly along the Historic Spine – it does not offer residents and visitors an attractive pedestrian environment in which to enjoy this heritage. Stratford is one of the few historic towns that still allows commercial vehicles to pick up and deliver all day long.

The Group worked alongside the Historic Spine Working Group to undertake a survey of road signs and lines along the Spine. The survey was carried out by members of the Stratford Society in August 2011. The results were written up as a report, commenting in general about yellow lines, followed by 24 comments about signs (or groups of signs) which might hopefully be removed or reduced in size in Henley Street, High Street, Chapel Street, Church Street and Old Town (a copy of the report on the survey is posted on the Society's web page). Members of the Society then walked the Spine with one of WCC's highways staff and agreed that

many of the signs could be removed, or reduced in size. Some have already been removed under WCC's maintenance budget and the Society has been assured that the remainder will be dealt with over the next 2-3 years. WCC has also agreed a special signage policy for the Spine – all new and replacement signs will be at the minimum size specified in the regulations, unless there are good reasons for not using the minimum.

Finally, the Group would like to see a pilot project introduced in Windsor Street to test out the concept of shared space (civilised streets). The Waterside and Southern Lane scheme is working well and the time has now come to test out the concept in a street where a large number of coach passengers currently have to cross a busy road, often in large groups. Turning the street into a shared space scheme would slow down traffic and create a more pedestrian-friendly environment. Guide Dogs for the Blind joined us in our deliberations and we agreed to work jointly with them to try and create a civilised street. In the context of the current financial crisis, progress would be slow, although many of the initial steps are low cost and could be introduced incrementally as funds became available.

Providing a new Bus Station and Southern P&R Facility

Several members of the Group were on the Steering Committees for these feasibility studies. The reports were presented in July and neither produced an economic business case to support the schemes. They could therefore only be implemented by using Section 106 funds. The Group reviewed the feasibility studies and accepted the Steering Groups' conclusions. The viability of the proposed Southern P&R facility, should nevertheless be reviewed again once the new Waitrose P&R service has been operating for 12 months.

Since bus congestion in Bridge and Wood Streets is an ongoing concern -- and even if a bus station was built it would be several years before it opened -- the Group contacted Stagecoach and Johnsons to discuss what might be done in the immediate future to alleviate the present situation. The bus companies responded positively and indicated that they would like to use the Leisure Centre car park for layovers. The matter is still being discussed with SDC.

Improving the Local Road Network

The main concern under this heading, is the large volume of HGVs that travel through the town and – of particular concern – travel over Clopton Bridge. The bridge traffic is a major blot on the landscape in one of the country's finest historic market towns. In this context, there is strong town-wide support for the proposed Shuttery by-pass and Seven Meadows link road. It could not remove much traffic from the town centre, but would enable heavy vehicles to be removed from Clopton Bridge, Banbury Road, Shipston Road and Tiddington Road. Many people furthermore feel there is a strong economic and environmental case for the bypass (the DfT do take environmental considerations into account when setting investment priorities). The proposed bypass should not therefore have to rely on Section 106 funding. It should be able to stand on its own feet. In terms of overall investment priorities, the Shuttery by-pass and Seven Meadows Link have the highest priority.

Replacing Lucy's Mill Bridge

Stratford Voice have developed a proposal to replace Lucy's Mill bridge with a new, fully DDA compliant alternative. Previous WCC feasibility studies had ruled out a replacement bridge on the grounds that it could not be built within land currently owned (or controlled) by WCC. Private land would have to be compulsorily purchased and the owners of the land had indicated that they would strongly oppose compulsory purchase proceedings. WCC therefore decided to shelve the project.

Since then, Stratford Voice have done a great deal of work on the project. Briefly, they: (i) carried out a survey of bridge users to test support for a replacement bridge (over 95% of respondents were in favour); (ii) assembled photos of potentially dangerous incidents that occurred because of the existing structure; (iii) established details of land ownership related to potential replacement of the bridge; (iv) met with representatives of potentially affected Resident's Groups to seek their views and concerns regarding a replacement bridge; (v) consulted the Environmental Agency to obtain outline details of their requirements regarding the construction of a new bridge; and (vi) met with WCC and Sustrans bridge engineers on site. All this work suggested that it was technically possible to construct a new DDA compliant bridge in its present location without encroaching on private property.

Stratford voice have now prepared terms of reference for a detailed feasibility of the project and are currently fund raising to cover the cost of the study. The Transport & Parking Group has supported Stratford Voice in the above work and think that, if the feasibility study shows that a replacement bridge is feasible without encroaching on private property, the scheme should have high priority.

Summary of Conclusions

(i) Parking in the Town. The new tariff structure recommended by the Working Group should be implemented – with minor variations – as soon as possible. Car park signage should also be simplified, with car parks branded to signify their prime usage (e.g., Theatre Quarter, Riverside, etc.). Finally, all car parks in the District should attempt to at least cover their costs.

(ii) Residents Parking. The ongoing WCC study should be completed as soon as possible. As part of the study, the consultants should consider wider resident's parking zones, extending the times when restrictions apply, reducing the time non-residents can park in controlled zones, increasing the costs of second and third resident's permits issued for the same address and trialling a scratch card system for visitor permits.

(iii) Upgrading the Town's Railway Stations. The DDA compliant footbridge due to be installed at Stratford station should be implemented as soon as possible and, once Stratford Parkway is operating, every effort should be made to keep the town station open.

(iv) Reinstating the Honeybourne Rail Line. The line should only be reinstated if can show a positive business case that would qualify for government grant support and would not require more than a token annual operating subsidy from WCC.

(v) Town Centre Streets and Signage. Efforts should continue to reduce traffic signs and lines in the town centre. In parallel with that, a shared space (civilised streets) trial should be implemented in Windsor Street to test the concept of shared space and its relevance to Stratford.

(vi) Bus Station and Southern P&R Facility. Neither of these projects has been able to produce a positive business case and cannot be supported at this time. However, the feasibility of the Southern P&R should be re-visited once the new Waitrose service has been operating for 12 months. In the meantime, the Transport & Parking Group – with SDC support – should continue to seek agreement on use of the Leisure Centre coach park for layovers.

(vii) Local Road Network. The Shottery by-pass and Seven Meadows Link are high priority infrastructure investments and attempts should be made to implement them as regular investments without Section 106 support.

(viii) Replacing Lucy's Mill Bridge. The ongoing efforts to replace this bridge with one that is DA compliant should be encouraged and supported.