

NAILSWORTH TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES of the **Special Meeting of Nailsworth Town Council** held at the Town Hall, Nailsworth on **Tuesday 16 August 2011**

Present	Cllr S Robinson (Town Mayor) Cllr P Carter Cllr N Dart Cllr M J Kelly * Cllr N I Kay * Cllr M M Rahman Cllr M P Robinson Cllr Mrs S E Thorpe (Deputy Mayor)
	County Cllr W S Waddington District Cllr P Carter District Cllr R Blackwell District Cllr Ms C S Farrell approx. 60 residents
Apologies	Cllr Mrs A Elliott Cllr Mrs S M Reed
	* denotes absence from part of the meeting

2011/79 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Mayor introduced the special meeting and the single topic for discussion. NTC had until end September to return the SDC questionnaire and individuals could also complete one by 9 September.

The Mayor explained that the SDC owned/run car parks under discussion were

- the lower part of the TH car park, 4hr (15 spaces)
- Old Market car park, upper part 23h (29 spaces) and lower part 2h (18 spaces)
- Bus station, 2hr (13 spaces)
- Newmarket Road car park, 23h (33 spaces)
- 30 minute on street parking in Old Market in front of and opposite the Library, by Brutons **including Co-Op car park and back of shops (46 spaces)**
- *30 minute on street parking in Fountain Street appeared to have been omitted from the list*

= 154 spaces in total

On street parking at the Spring Hill end of Old Market opposite Passage to India (24 spaces) was covenanted to provide free parking. The upper half of the TH car park (21 spaces) was owned by NTC and was currently managed on its behalf by SDC. The George Street car park was privately owned by Chamberlain Estates

The SDC consultation document reported that it cost £16881 last year to manage and maintain its car parks in Nailsworth, most of the cost relating to business rates, waste water rates, maintenance, cleaning. The Mayor invited comments from the floor:

Gordon Pearce, Nailsworth Ironmongers quoted from a statement by MP Eric Pickles outlining the government's intention to give more control back to local communities, remove central regulation and encourage business. He particularly made the point that "Parking charges should not be seen as a revenue raising tool". Mr Pearce was convinced that introducing parking charges would damage the local economy and cause greater hardship to the town's small businesses, driving custom away to out of town retail parks. Nailsworth had regenerated itself through its own efforts and with little help from SDC. Mr Pearce also expressed concern over the short consultation period which did not comply with government recommendations. Mr Pearce believed the decision had already been made and the consultation was an empty formality.

Mr Pickles' statement indicated that the draft Localism Bill was going through parliament currently, which would have an impact on planning and shift power from central government back to individuals and local councils.

John Burfitt, Church Street resident added that some consideration should be given to town centre residents, many of whom work in the town and support local business. Charging for parking would have a great impact on the decision to live in the town. The council needed to explore the whole subject of parking, including how to deal with antisocial parking, and long term blocking of spaces by traders and workers driving in from outside the town.

Jeff Hall, resident said shoppers would go elsewhere and this action would kill the town commercially.

District Cllr Rowland Blackwell as a Nailsworth resident first and foremost, was 95% against the proposal; the only advantage he could see would be for enforcement officers to be able to move people around. Those from outlying areas who popped in for 10 minutes to get a pint of milk would be expected to pay at least an hour's parking, and Cllr Blackwell thought it important to retain at least some short term free parking. If those parking long term were charged, they would move out of the centre and block surrounding residential streets unless yellow lines were painted everywhere – and policed. Cllr Blackwell also questioned why it was proposed to charge 50p in Nailsworth, but 30p in Wotton and Dursley. People would go elsewhere, and businesses would suffer.

Sue Arnold, the Optical Shop, reported that the privately owned George Street car park was working much better since the 2hour limit was being more rigorously enforced. She suggested the first 1 or 2 hours should be free, but could one ensure that the resulting income was then used for the benefit of the town? e.g. To help keep the Library open.

Mike King, George Street car park manager for Chamberlain Estates was against charging elsewhere in the town which would increase pressure on the George Street free car park. Mr King thought enforcing parking time limits was much better than charging.

Richard Barnwell, Fewster Road resident and independent gardener felt there were already too many taxes, with this being just another form of taxation which people could not afford.

Pam Browne, Fewster Road resident and Walking for Health organiser mentioned people from outside the town joining her walks would be unable to come if they could not park, especially as the local buses were being cut. Nailsworth thrived because it had free parking.

A spokesperson for Old Bristol Road residents said residents had nowhere else to park and had to make use of what was available, living in houses which were built before cars were invented. She felt this action would destroy the community.

Allan Beale, Churchill Road resident commented that it was obvious the general opinion was firmly against the proposal and asked what options the town had to stop the forced introduction of parking charges.

The Mayor proposed to arrange a meeting with the SDC cabinet member, head of car parking and any other relevant officers to discuss Nailsworth's position. SDC seemed to do what it wanted, despite cursory consultations, and had tried several times over the years to force parking charges on Nailsworth, whereas Stonehouse and Painswick had asked for this in their communities. The Mayor would also want to talk to Wotton and Dursley to see how they were reacting to the proposal for their towns. Town and District Cllr Paul Carter advised that SDC would not want to hand over its car parks, but if NTC wanted to take them on, it would have to pick up the bill, management costs, enforcement etc.

Jonathan Duckworth, town centre resident asked why SDC had only shown one year's worth of costs in its consultation document, and recommended that records for the last 5 years should be requested. He had himself managed car parks in the past, both free and paying, and noted that the proposal gave no estimate of the potential income to be raised from charges. He would want to know what had been the impact on residents and businesses when charges were introduced in Painswick and Stonehouse.

District Cllr Catherine Farrell supported the town's views and was totally against parking charges. She would be happy to join in the meeting with SDC officers and supported the use of government statements for ammunition, and to join with other communities under threat.

Mr Pearce, father of Gordon above, asked who had started the idea that parking should be paid for in Nailsworth; Stonehouse had volunteered to have paid parking, and was now saying Nailsworth should too! Nailsworth was much smaller than Stroud and income levels similarly disparate. Stroud had greater and larger facilities to bring people in, and SDC was the biggest employer in the town. A great portion of Nailsworth tax payers' money was spent in Stroud with very little passed back down to Nailsworth, and Stroud should have no right to impose its wishes on the town. Nailsworth tax payers had contributed to building Ebley Mill with its huge free car park almost exclusively filled with the vehicles of Ebley Mill staff. What about SDC's £1.2million underspend? Mr Pearce senior also questioned the figure of £16,881 to run Nailsworth's car parks. Much of the parking in the town was on land gifted to Nailsworth over the years, so only a small income was available from other spaces and hardly worth bothering with. Tax payers spent a fortune on policing Stroud car parks 24/7.

The Mayor explained that when the Urban District Council was disbanded, many of the town's car parks were handed over to Stroud.

Tony Evans, former Cllr added that this was because the newly formed NTC did not want to take on the cost of running them, but added that SDC's previous attempts to impose charges had been abandoned as not worth the trouble. Mr Evans advised that planning permission for the shops in Old Market had been conditional on providing parking spaces in the road behind. With the potential for fewer than 200 paying bays available, employing a warden to police them was not cost effective.

Bill Affleck, Watledge resident commented that there was a clear consensus that the town did not want paid parking and asked how to go about securing this as the SDC document

made it reasonably clear that the decision had already been taken. Mr Affleck reckoned NTC would have to take on the management of the town's car parks, but should claim £16k from SDC to cover the cost, as residents did not want to pay twice through taxes and an increase in the precept.

County Cllr Stan Waddington thought that putting parking charges into small market towns needed careful consideration and now was not the right time. He explained that Stonehouse had asked for parking charges when charges were introduced in the station car park, and commuters started parking in the free public car park after residents resisted their attempt to colonise their streets. Cllr Waddington advised NTC should look very carefully at the cost of enforcement and management before seeking to take on the town's car parks.

Ian Crawley, former town cllr advised NTC to make SDC well aware of the strength of public feeling, and urged residents to individually email the SDC leader directly to protest. Residents needed to keep involved and provide full support for NTC to fight on their behalf, and remain part of the decision about the future of the town's car parks.

Alan Wheeler, B&B owner/Church Street resident asked that SDC be invited to make a presentation to residents to explain their case, and detail the costs and practicalities of the scheme.

District Cllr Catherine Farrell added that Nailsworth could be the victim of parking envy and noted that the questionnaire did not ask if people wanted to remove charging in Stroud.

A resident referred to traders' parking which had been discussed in the past and felt alternative parking should be found for them in order to free up town centre spaces for shoppers.

District Cllr Blackwell reported that he had been searching a long time for a suitable long term parking site and the only possibility was at Wyevale, owned by Chamberlain Estates. Mr Chamberlain was currently applying for planning permission, and if granted, he proposed to offer some long term parking there. Cllr Blackwell was lobbying planning officers in the hope that the application would be approved.

A resident advised that traders still had the option of parking at Egypt Mill at a cost of £2 per day, with weekends free. The charge could be invoiced and set against tax, so presented no real cost to traders.

The Mayor closed the discussion and thanked everyone for their contribution; the message was coming over loud and clear.

Sally Millett, Forest Green Residents Association added her full support and urged each resident to make representation in writing to SDC to support and endorse the town's refusal to accept the proposal.

2011/80 RESPONSE TO SDC'S PROPOSAL TO INTRODUCE CAR PARKING CHARGES IN NAILSWORTH

The Mayor was pleased with the good turnout and comments from residents. Cllrs agreed they could not decide on a final response tonight and needed to speak to the SDC cabinet member and car parking senior officer Alison Fisk, as well as obtain more information. Cllr Kay circulated some draft answers to the 10 questions on the questionnaire. The consultation document made it clear this initiative was a revenue raiser, but a good part of SDC's argument was that it would "increase turnover and encourage the town's vitality", which claim needed to be challenged. Local authorities across the country were trying to

raise revenue in this way. There was a study from Monmouthshire CC which raised questions as to the value of charging schemes.

Cllr Mrs Thorpe felt residents had made some very helpful points and suggested the notes of these should be passed on to SDC to illustrate the strength of feeling and concern.

Cllr M Robinson was most interested in the historical reasons why charges were introduced in Stonehouse and why they were not appropriate for Nailsworth, but was very reluctant to support the suggestion that NTC take over management of the town's car parks, which would require additional funding from somewhere. Non driving residents were not represented this evening, but no doubt they would not be happy to subsidise parking through a raised precept. NTC needed to consider the best way forward for all residents.

It was noted that the Urban District Council gave up the town's car parks in order not to incur extra costs and increase the burden on resident tax payers. Cllr Kay added that he had recommended parking charges in Stonehouse and Painswick when he was an SDC cabinet member, because those communities had requested it. Stroud had to raise funds to pay off its loan for building the Brunel car park. At the time, it had been made clear that nowhere else wanted to charge for parking and it would not be imposed.

Cllr Kelly supported consultation with Wotton and Dursley, and felt with such a small number of spaces affected, the scheme could not possibly be economical. There were only 204 parking spaces in the whole town, excluding the private George Street car park.

Cllr Rahman thought it was important to discover how much profit would be made and how much it would cost to run the scheme, eg. Wardens, pay & display units, repairs and maintenance, etc. An estimate of income against expenses was essential. Cllr Carter advised that he had already asked Alison Fisk for more figures and a breakdown of the £16k alleged running cost. It was also questioned that the consultation document indicated that running expenses were twice as much in Nailsworth as for an equivalent number of parking spaces in Dursley and Cainscross.

RESOLVED Cllr Kay proposed, seconded by Cllr Mrs Thorpe that NTC was strongly opposed to the imposition of parking charges in Nailsworth. The motion was carried unanimously, bar one abstention from Cllr Carter.

The following steps were agreed:

- 1 Obtain more facts and figures from SDC for a five year period, before completing the questionnaire. Cllr Carter obtaining from Alison Fisk.
- 2 Ask for an assessment of income –v- costs of the scheme
- 3 Ask if SDC has considered the impact on free parking spaces elsewhere in the town and will it be paying to paint yellow lines everywhere else.
- 4 Remind SDC that it has a responsibility for the wellbeing of the whole district and its towns.
- 5 Arrange a meeting with the relevant people at SDC: leader Frances Roden, cabinet member Nigel Cooper, relevant officer(s) Karen Toole, Alison Fisk, Ward Cllrs, County Cllr, community and trader representatives. Dates suggested were Monday 5th, Wednesday 7th, Thursday 8th September.
- 6 Set up a subcommittee to prepare draft answers to the questionnaire and research evidence to back up NTC's argument and dispel the illusion that this will be of benefit to the town. Ask for help from representatives of the town's traders. Cllr Mrs Thorpe would speak with Gordon Pearce.

- 7 Talk to counterparts in Wotton and Dursley. The Mayor would do so.
- 8 Work towards ensuring the economic wellbeing of Nailsworth
- 9 Ask the Chamber of Trade what it was doing to help and to appoint a representative to join the subcommittee.
- 10 The Mayor would ensure good coverage was given to the issue in his report in the next Nailsworth News, out at the end of this month, and encourage individuals to make separate responses.

Whether to organise a public meeting with SDC officers was discussed, but it was thought they would be unlikely to be prepared to face the public, nor could another such good turnout of residents be guaranteed.

It was understood that Sue Arnold was drawing up a petition to be signed by traders, but the Clerk warned that NTC should be consulted about the wording since it had yet to form its final response. Cllr M Robinson suggested there could be another petition for residents to sign at the Farmers Market, with the simple slogan : "hands off our town!"

.....
Chairman

.....
date