

Allocating Some Spaces in Church Street Car Park for Public Use

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I am Chairman of the Stratford Society/Stratforward Transport & Parking Group and want to raise three issues for your consideration.

First, the demand for off-street car parking in this part of the town.

As the car park map shows, the Southern part of the town is poorly served by off-street public car parks. Commuters are particularly badly hit. Greenhill Street does not issue permits, Mansell Street charges £25 per week (roughly £1,200 p.a.), while NCP charges £15 per week (roughly £750 p.a.) provided the car enters before 9.00 am and stays in the car park all day (the car park closes at 8.00 pm). The Civic Hall issues a limited number of permits for £450 p.a., but there are no reserved spaces and commuters – particularly businesses like Music Matters who have to use their car during the day for service calls and deliveries – cannot always find a space when they return.

I spoke to several businesses in Church and Chapel Streets to find out what they did about parking. Most staff – particularly restaurant staff who work late – park on-street near the Shell Garage, collect their car after 6.00 pm when on-street restrictions are lifted and then park it on-street near where they work. When asked about Church Street, all said they would seriously consider paying £500 for an annual season ticket.

Shoppers are less badly affected, since they can park for 2 hours on-street in Church Street, Chestnut Walk and Old Town (limited number of spaces). Typically, however, they park free in the Old Town residents parking zone, which greatly annoys Old Town residents. Those who park off-street tend to use the Civic Hall car park.

Overall, the area South of Ely and Sheep Streets is poorly served by off-street car parks and would benefit enormously from access to some parking spaces in the Church Street car park. Furthermore, potential users – at least the commuters I spoke to -- say they are willing to pay.

Second, on-street parking along the Historic Spine.

A wide cross-section of Stratford residents – together with all three local authorities – support the Historic Spine Project which is attempting to make the town centre more user-friendly. Among other things, this calls for the possible re-location of some on-street parking spaces in High and Chapel Streets to other on or off-street locations. The business community is bitterly opposed to a simple reduction of on-street spaces. However, allocating some of the spaces in Church Street car park for public use should make it possible to eliminate a corresponding number of on-street spaces in High and Chapel Streets without alienating the business community.

Finally, the financial impact of allowing the public to use some of the spaces in the Church Street car park.

The Church Street car park has 197 parking spaces. On weekdays during the day it is used by Council Members/Officials and some visitors. In the evenings and weekends, the car park is open to the public. Gross revenue earned is about £77,000 p.a. Roughly two thirds of the car park is owned by the Perkins Trust and there is a complicated formula which allocates part of the revenue earned on this land to the Trust. The Chairman of the trust has confirmed that, subject to the views of the Trust's solicitor, if the Council were to change the use of that part of the car park owned by the Trust they would need to seek the permission of the Trust. However, my understanding is that this does not apply to the land owned by the Council.

About 67 parking spaces are sited on Council-owned land and the revenue earned from these spaces presumably goes directly to the Council. If 30 of these spaces were allocated for public use – say 10 commuter spaces and 20 short term spaces – they would generate up to £30,000 p.a. (£5,000 from season tickets and another £25,000 from short stay users). The season ticket holders would not be diverting from other off-street car parks – hence no loss of revenue – while the bulk of the short-stay on-street users would be diverting from Old Town residents parking spaces. There might be some loss of on-street revenue in Church Street and Chestnut Walk, but it is likely to be small.

In 2005, the Council employed 377 staff (both full and part time) and this is due to fall to 265 in 2011-2012. In 2005 the Church Street car park was servicing 377 members of staff and about 50 elected Members. By 2012 this will have dropped to 265 staff (a reduction of 112, or 30 %) and roughly the same number of Members. These staff reductions should make it possible to allocate up to 30 of the spaces in the Church Street car park (about 15 % overall) for use by the general public.

Conclusion.

My conclusion is that allocating up to 30 of the 197 parking spaces in Church Street car park for use by the public is a win-win strategy. It would greatly benefit commuters working in Church and Chapel Streets (particularly restaurant staff), would enable more short-term users to patronise the shops and restaurants in these streets without alienating Old Town residents, would facilitate attempts to reduce on-street parking along the Historic Spine and would make a useful contribution to the Council's revenue.

Notes:

[0.31 + 0.16 = 0.17 hectares]

[People Strategy 2010 – 2015]

[Your Guide to Council Tax 2010-2012]

30% reduction in staff, 26% reduction in staff plus Members