

## **Transport & Parking Group Annual Report 2012/13**

Members: Ian G Heggie (Stratford Society), Chairman; Chris Gregory (Stratforward) Vice Chairman; Jayne Angle (represents town businesses); Lloyd Beesley (Stratford Voice); Roger Bennett (Warwickshire County Council); John Deegan (co-opted technical specialist); Elizabeth Dixon (Blue Badge users); Jenny Fradgley (Town Council); Keith Lloyd (Stratford Town Council); Martyn Luscombe (Stratford Voice); Kate Rolfe (Warwickshire County Council); Robin Sankey (Stratford Society); Nicola Small (Warwickshire County Council); Yvette Widdowfield (Stratford District Council).

### **Preamble**

During the course of the year, the Group revised its terms of reference and re-branded itself as the Stratford-upon-Avon Town Transport Group (STTG) to recognise the realities of how it now functions. Among other things, this means it is now officially facilitated by the Stratford Society, Stratforward (the Stratford BID) and Stratford Town Council. The Town Council officially nominates two members of the Group and awards us a Community Grant to cover the cost of our free use of the Town Hall. The Group now submits its Annual Report to all three sponsors.

Membership remains broadly the same, although the Group has now been given the power to “co-opt up to two technical specialists to help with their work.” John Deegan, former Strategic Director of Environment & Economy at Warwickshire County Council, is the first person to be co-opted onto the Group in this way.

The Group’s web page – accessed through the Society’s web page ([www.stratfordsociety.co.uk](http://www.stratfordsociety.co.uk)) -- has been extensively revised to reflect the current work of the Group. The web page can also be accessed through web links included on Stratford Town Council, Stratforward and Stratford District Council web pages.

### **Review of Annual Work Programme**

The Group reviewed and acted upon a number of important transport issues during the year. The key ones are briefly summarised below.

Town Ambassador Courses. The Group re-instated these courses when Stratford Town Management Partnership went into administration. They turned out to be very popular and were strongly supported by Stratforward who handled most administrative matters. The courses were re-instated towards the end of 2011 and two full courses were delivered in 2012. In September 2012, the Group decided that full responsibility for the courses should be handed over to Stratforward (who had inherited many of the other STMP responsibilities). As a result, the courses are now offered several times per year by Stratforward.

### **Parking Charges and Related Matters**

The practical work on parking in Stratford-upon-Avon was guided by a major survey, carried out by Stratforward – with input from the STTG -- 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 the Group and also by a separate Working Group set up by SDC (which included several representatives from STTG). 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 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) the town's car parks should be consistently named (e.g., where is Unicorn Meadow?) and car parks should be branded to ensure motorists can easily find one that suits their needs.

The proposed new parking arrangements – for all car parks in the town – were considered by SDC's Cabinet on Monday 8th October 2012 and they accepted nearly all the recommendations made by the Working Group. The price changes, together with the new 72 hour rate, were introduced on the 10th December, just in time for Christmas. Further work is ongoing to introduce pay-by-phone, open the Church Street car park to the public from 4.00 pm and to change the names of selected car parks. The new tariff is a great improvement on the previous one and compares well with other tariffs in the town (i.e., in private car parks) and with tariffs in competitor towns like Touchwood at Solihull, Leamington and Warwick

### **Park & Ride**

The 2010 survey also looked at the Bishopton (Northern) Park & Ride. Prior to May 2012, the last shuttle bus left Bridge Street just after 7.0 pm (which meant commuters had to leave work by 6.45 pm to catch the last bus) and the gate was locked at 7.30 pm, after which a fine was payable to get the car released. It was no surprise that only about 6% of commuters in the survey used P&R. However, those that did – staff who regularly finished work before about 6.30 pm -- found the service convenient and of high quality. The Group therefore argued that this Park & Ride could be made more attractive to commuters – particularly those who regularly have to work late, or cannot leave the office before 6.30 pm -- by extending the opening hours. WCC responded positively to these suggestions and, on 28 May 2012, the operating hours were extended from 7.0 pm to 11.30 pm.

In late July 2012, a second Park & Ride facility was opened on the Shipston Road. Alas, the facility is performing well below expectations and is barely attracting 40% of the forecast demand. Since a Southern P&R could help to reduce traffic congestion in the town centre, the STTG therefore reviewed the current operation to try and find out why it was not working according to plan.

Our review identified a number of factors that seemed to be suppressing demand for the new P&R facility: (i) cars cannot stay in the car park for more than 9 hours which makes it almost impossible for a commuter to use the site; (ii) vehicles have to pay £1.00 to park and this – when added to the bus fares – makes the P&R uncompetitive in relation to off-street car parks in the town; (iii) the shuttle bus operates every half hour, compared to every 15 minutes at the Northern P&R site; (iv) the P&R facility is not sign posted on the Banbury and Evesham Roads; (v) web-based information about the P&R is limited (it is not even mentioned on the national P&R web sites); and (vi) the new site is not being actively marketed – many potential users are unaware of its existence.

The Group's conclusion was that the promoters of the Southern P&R should address the above concerns and set a few targets to significantly raise patronage over the next few months.

### **Resident's Parking**

In 2010, the Town Council 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 the above concerns by agreeing to carry out a fundamental review of the residents parking scheme in the town. The Group commented on the terms of reference for the review which is ongoing.

### **De-cluttering the Town Centre Streets**

It is not only road signs that blight our streets. They are also blighted by street-furniture that is either redundant, over-sized, poorly designed or badly located. One of the recent additions to the town's streetscape that raised the ire of the Group, was the huge BT Broadband cupboard recently erected just outside Hall's Croft. It is very intrusive and was erected in its present location in spite of planning permission which required it to be sited in a less intrusive position further along the street. The Group was outraged and – with strong support from Cllr Rolfe – appealed to have it re-located to the site specified in the original planning permission. We were therefore delighted to learn that the cupboard will be re-located to its approved site before the end of March 2013.

### **Bus Congestion in Wood and Greenhill Streets**

Bus congestion in these two streets has long been a bone of contention. Some buses spend too much time waiting at the bus stops with the result that long queues develop, the street gets blocked and some buses end up double parking. The Group felt that the current situation was intolerable and getting worse. We therefore met with Johnsons Coaches and Stagecoach to explore possible solutions.

The bus companies were very responsive and expressed willingness to sit down with SDC to try and work out a protocol under which they would use the Leisure Centre coach park for long layovers to help reduce on-street bus congestion in Wood and Greenhill Streets. The

matter is now in the hands of SDC officers and we will keep on pestering them until a mutually acceptable solution is found.

### **Proposed Honeybourne Rail Line Re-instatement**

Several reviews of the proposed Honeybourne rail line re-instatement have been carried out since 1996. The most recent review, carried out by Arup's, has looked at the potential for re-instating the old rail line in a cutting and taking it under both Evesham Road roundabout and Wetherby Way in a tunnel. The Group reviewed the consultant's report and raised several concerns. The consultants estimated that the above dive-under solution would cost roughly £76 million (£96.9 million when "optimism bias" is included) and that Option 1 (hourly Leamington to Worcester service, plus hourly Stratford to Oxford service) would make a loss in the first year of operation (2019/20) of £1.9 million, while Option 2 (hourly Stratford to Worcester service, plus hourly Stratford to Oxford service) would make a loss of £1.3 million. The subsidy reduces over time, provided traffic continues to grow and fares continue to rise. The consultants benefit/cost analysis only showed a positive B/C ratio under a high demand growth scenario (6% per year). The project, in its present form, is not financially viable -- it requires an initial investment of £76 million, plus a substantial annual subsidy -- and is unlikely to attract any government grant.

In spite of the above reservations, the Group suggested that WCC should not automatically dismiss such proposals, but should remain open minded about the possibility of eventually reinstating the rail link (perhaps using a low-emission tram/train system). However, no scheme should be implemented unless it could demonstrate a positive business case and could be shown not to cause significant impact on residents living close to the route.

### **New Traffic Regulations in High Street**

The Group also looked at the idea of introducing pick-up and delivery restrictions in the town centre. The restrictions would ideally follow the lead set by other historic market towns, where commercial vehicles typically cannot pick-up and deliver goods to town centre premises between 10.30 am and 4.00 pm. WCC responded positively to our concerns and developed a scheme for High Street which involves banning all parking on the Debenhams side of the road, banning loading between 08.00 am and 6.00 pm, creating two designated loading bays (one on each side of the road) and providing four blue badge parking spaces -- to the recommended wider design with a three hour time limit for users of blue-badges -- on the other side of the road. The required traffic orders (TROs) have now been advertised and the new restrictions will come into effect in March/April 2013. If these restrictions work well, similar restrictions might eventually be introduced elsewhere in the town centre.

WCC also consulted the Group on the new signs and lines to be used in High Street. The consensus was that WCC should attempt to use signage similar to that used in Henley Street and that this "branding" might eventually be extended to cover the entire Historic Spine (i.e., the route from Shakespeare's Birthplace to Holy Trinity Church).

Alongside the above changes, the TROs also remove a number of other anomalies in the parking regulations. An important one -- which the Group has long pressed for -- is

replacement of the half our maximum parking restriction in Bridge, High and Union Streets with a one hour restriction.

### **Coach Travel Through the Town**

A visitor attraction like Stratford-upon-Avon is understandably a major destination for out-of-town coach tours. Unfortunately, with narrow streets and sharp corners, a significant number of residents and town businesses find the coaches irritating and would like to see them banned from town centre streets. This was the context in which the Group set out to explore how irritating the coaches were, what benefits the town gained from visiting coaches and what – if anything – could be done to reduce their impact on town centre streets.

The first thing we discovered was that the coaches do make a positive contribution to the town economy. A local travel business supplies 220 locally-based guides to the five largest tour operators visiting the town and about 100 guides to the smaller operators. During their stay in the town, the coach passengers typically have lunch (mainly at Marlowe's Restaurant, but sometimes at The Falcon Hotel ) and also spend a short time visiting local shops.

One of the major pinch-points occurs in High Street. The new parking arrangements should help to improve the situation, but currently a combination of delivery vehicles, coaches and other traffic creates an unpleasant pedestrian environment. High Street businesses are acutely aware of this and blame it for discouraging shoppers from visiting the street. Given this concern, positive steps may need to be taken to discourage coaches from using High Street and other sensitive town centre streets.

The Group's view was that the only feasible solution was for WCC to identify a series of "advisory" coach routes through the town – together with suitable drop off/pick up points (e.g., in Church Street, behind Marks & Spencer, etc.) -- to serve the needs of coach operators visiting the Birthplace, Holy Trinity Church, Anne Hathaway's Cottage and other visitor attractions in the town. Some road improvements might be required to enable double wheelbase coaches to turn into some of the designated routes (e.g., Chapel Lane) and other minor road works may also be required. The routes might then be issued to coach operators as an Advisory Notice to discourage use of High Street and other sensitive town centre streets. The Advisory Notice would need to be positively disseminated to coach operators via the Coach Tour Operators Association, the Guild of Registered Tourist Guides and SDC's Destination Steering Group.

This proposal was discussed at the recent WCC/SDC Transport Seminar and Councillors suggested they would like further consideration to be given to the issues. However, it has not been included in WCC's 2103/14 work programme, because there is currently no resource available to take it forward.

### **Proposed Experimental Closure of High Street**

The Stratford Society invited the Group to comment on its proposals to apply to close High Street to traffic for a few days shortly after the Shakespeare Birthday Celebrations. The aim was to show what the street might look and feel like with less traffic. It would be a demonstration project to test the impact of giving pedestrians more priority in the town centre.

The Group reviewed the proposal and decided that a date shortly after Shakespeare's birthday was likely to be premature. They felt it might be better to wait until the new Traffic Orders (see above) – banning parking on the Debenhams side of the street and restricting deliveries during the middle of the day – had been implemented in March/April and the new street signage had been implemented (the new signage will be similar to Henley Street and less intrusive than WCC's standard signage). The Group also wanted to make further progress in relation to reducing coach traffic in High Street by publishing "advisory" coach routes through the town. These changes to the streetscape would then provide a new -- and hopefully better -- base from which to test additional changes to the streetscape.

The Group therefore suggested that the trial should be postponed until at least September (or even April 2014) and that the Society should consider whether they wanted to promote a trial involving full closure of the street, instead of simply slowing down the traffic (via chicanes, or similar devices). The Group felt that, if the Society's ultimate aim was to allow traffic to continue using the street, a slowing down pilot scheme might produce better results than simply closing the street.

### **Lucy's Mill Bridge**

Stratford Voice have developed a proposal to replace Lucy's Mill Foot Bridge with an alternative that would be accessible for all users. 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 accessible foot bridge in its present location without necessarily encroaching on private property.

Stratford voice have now prepared terms of reference for a detailed feasibility study of the project and, together with the Town Council, are hoping to set up a Working Group to raise

the money required to cover the cost of the study feasibility. The Group has actively supported Stratford Voice throughout the above work.

### **Neighbourhood Plan**

In September 2012, the Group prepared a draft section on the town's transport system for the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group. The draft is available on our web page. The draft has unfortunately been over-taken by a number of extraneous events – like the outcome of the Shottery planning inquiry – and now needs to be updated. The Group is currently awaiting feedback from the Steering Group before doing any further work on it.

### **Parkway Travel Forum**

WCC have established Stratford Travel Forum to promote the new Stratford Parkway Station which is due to open on 19th May. Elizabeth Dixon represents the STTG on the Forum and the WCC officer who looks after the Forum, Nicola Small, attends meetings of the STTG to brief us on progress. The aim of the Forum is to ensure businesses know about the new station and the opportunities it offers. To facilitate use of the station, WCC have prepared a new cycle map and are in the process of improving pavements along Timothy's Bridge Road to improve pedestrian access to the new station. In May a series of Road-shows will be held to give additional information to local businesses about Parkway Station and the new services it is offering. STTG has raised the issue of there not being any accessible toilets at the new station (it is not logical to have two stations in the town, neither of which can provide this facility) and WCC will support Elizabeth in her request to London Midland to make the necessary changes.

### **Reports Prepared During the Year**

Three reports were prepared during the year:

- (i) August 2012, "Neighbourhood Plan: Notes on the town's transport system."
- (ii) September 2012, "Managing Out-of-Town Coaches Travelling Through the Town Centre."
- (iii) February 2013, "Rosebird Centre P&R: A Review of Current Performance".

All three reports can be found on our web page.