

Scrutiny Meeting Notes

Introduction – Shara Vickers Chair of the SWBID, here with Lisa Cleaver SWBID Manager.

Thank you for allowing us to attend this meeting this evening and giving us the opportunity to speak to you directly.

As you may be aware, the SWBID **represents the business community of Saffron Walden town centre** and over the past three weeks we have drawn their attention to your car park consultation and have urged them, their customers and clients to respond accordingly.

As the **collective voice of the business community** in SW, one of our key roles is to share with you their concerns regarding the proposed hourly tariff increases, the excessive increases to season tickets at Swan meadow car park, the removal of Sunday free car parking and the removal of free parking at Catons Lane which have all been outlined in your consultation document.

We and our members understand that parking creates revenue for UDC and we appreciate that parking has not been increased since 2015. However we are concerned that having commissioned a consultant to assess and suggest new tariffs for parking in Uttlesford, aligned to other towns in Essex and the surrounding counties, it appears that UDC has chosen to disregard their recommendations and increase prices on all areas of parking ranging from 34% to 133%.

We would prefer to see lower increases overall given the change in the national economy and cost of living crisis since these consultants prepared their report. These proposals take between £248,000 and £355,000 out of the Saffron Walden town centre, this is surely excessive in the current climate.

We and our members are worried that the increased parking fees could negatively impact the town centre's vitality and therefore should be a crucial consideration for councillors. If the majority of revenue generated from car parks is derived from individuals who work and shop in the town centre, raising parking fees could potentially deter these people, leading to a decline in footfall, overall economic activity and in turn parking revenue.

The increases to season tickets was also very worrying for our members, many of which are workers and business owners in the town centre. The proposed

annual increase from £300 to £550 seems very unjustified. We are aware that some businesses in the town cover the cost of their employees parking and this will be significantly affected, perhaps cease, if the cost to business is too much to bear.

And that brings me onto **Catons Lane**: Our businesses located in the town centre are concerned about the knock on effects of making this a chargeable car park. They recognise that it is used primarily by many town centre employees.

Businesses are worried that staff recruitment will be negatively impacted. Potential employees will be deterred from working in the town centre as parking is already expensive and diminishes their earnings.

If businesses can't recruit locally they could look to relocate their premises elsewhere thereby negatively impacting the vibrancy of our town.

The removal of Sunday free parking seriously needs to be reconsidered. Free Sunday parking acts as a draw to our town and its shops and business and many restaurants and cafes are now trading on Sundays. Removing free parking could deter shoppers and visitors and could also have a negative impact on Sunday trading which has picked up over the years.

Increasing parking fees is the opposite approach to that taken by many local authorities. We believe a free parking period would encourage footfall and in turn increase economic activity.

We request you to consider the following recommendations:

1. Sensibly weigh up the short-term financial gains from increased parking fees against the potential long-term consequences for the town centre's economic health, local business and the overall well-being of the community.
2. Reconsider your proposals and at the very least bring the tariff price changes back in line with the recommendations made by Parking Matters
3. Reconsider the enormous price changes both annually and monthly for Swan meadow season tickets primarily used by town centre workers. It would be beneficial to create a special 12 month payment scheme for town centre employees since annual payment for some is an extremely large sum to pay up-front. Some larger companies offer this to

employees but Saffron Walden mainly consists of small independent traders.

4. Keep Catons Lane as a free car park for town centre employees and those parents who use the car park for school drop off and collection.
5. Introduce special loading permits for town centre businesses who don't have commercial vehicles. We have asked for this for many years on behalf of our members.
6. Implement a trial of free parking for 2 hours.
7. Explore alternative revenue-generation strategies that do not compromise the town centre's vitality and future viability.

Thank you