

Car parking call-in: statement from Andy Boddington, Shropshire Councillor for Ludlow North

Financial

The Car Parking Accounts for 2022-23 show a surplus of about £2.4m, after highways and transport costs. This is surely adequate annual income to pay for the proposed reviews and upgrading of car parks over the next few years, though probably not enough for building new car parks. In Ludlow, car park charges currently raise nearly £900,000 a year – c. £692,000 a year after administration and operating costs are deducted. That is sufficient to pay for car park improvements and other needs for the town.

Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 specifies the purposes to which surplus funds should be put. The first is to repay any subsidy the council has made for car parking from the general fund. The second which is pertinent here is “meeting all or any part of the cost of the provision and maintenance by the local authority of off-street parking accommodation, whether in the open or under cover.” Paragraph 7.22 of the cabinet report states: “the alternative to using at least part of the additional income is to transfer funds from the Highways budget, consequently reducing their ability to perform their functions.” The annual surplus of £2.4m seems adequate income to meet the needs set out in Recommendations 5-7 of the cabinet report for the next few years. There are currently no proposals before the council for investment in new car parks in Shrewsbury or elsewhere. At a time when high streets are struggling, the council should not raise charges at the expense of local economies.

Retail Economy

Ludlow town centre’s retail economy is in the balance. In November 2017, there were just seven empty shops in the town centre. By 2020, before the pandemic, there were 20 empty shops. In November 2023, the number had increased to 23.

There are a number of factors behind the increase in vacancies, including internet shopping, increased rents, increased business rates for medium sized shops, and out of town shopping. However, it is clear that the 2018 increase in parking charges has also been a factor in reducing shopping, adding to the other woes facing the town.

Comparisons with charges in other towns doesn’t work for Ludlow. The town is 30 miles from the nearest large urban centre and it’s expensive to get here. Day visitor numbers

have dropped across the county including Ludlow (STEAM Economic Impact Study 2023) and we have witnessed that in Ludlow.

It is difficult to achieve a modal shift in travel in Ludlow. Improvements for cycling and walking have been under consideration but these plans were withdrawn last week. The park and ride service will not achieve a modal shift without substantial improvement. It is half-hourly. The last bus leaves town at 5.30pm. The ageing buses are prone to breakdown and it can take up to 45 minutes to get from the town centre to the park and ride when that occurs.

Conclusion

It is clear from the documents for this meeting and for Cabinet, these charges are led by the needs of Shrewsbury. Due to the policy of banding car parking charges, the smaller towns will suffer collateral damage because of increases in Shrewsbury. The increase in bands does not solve this. The need for new car parks or modal shift in Shrewsbury should not be paid for by Ludlow or other smaller market towns.

The new parking strategy, which I hope will set the rates most appropriate for each town, should be put in place before there is any substantial increase in car park charges.

I contend that there is sufficient money being generated from car parking to fund the service and changes for the next few years. When plans are brought forward for new parking infrastructure, the council should revisit parking charges.

Recommendations

1. The council should implement from 1 April 2024 a modest increase in parking charges to take account of increased costs.
2. The council should use the current surplus funds to pay for the new parking strategy and staffing review.
3. After adoption of the parking strategy, the council should review car parking charges again.

Annexes

Statement from Ludlow Chamber of Commerce

Ludlow Chamber of Commerce, who represent over 100 independent businesses in the town, strongly oppose the proposed parking increases by Shropshire Council for April 2024. By adding 20p onto existing prices it will further deter the appeal of the town to

shoppers. The additional money raised for the Council is disproportionate to the negative longer-term effect it will have on the local economy. However, as a counterbalance for the increase Ludlow Chamber would like to see the free on street 'pop and shop' parking of 15 minutes extended to 30 minutes.

Income from Ludlow car parking

Income (Gross Revenue)

Galelford: £278,966

Castle: £209,446

Smithfield: £44,831

On Street: £336,883

Total: £870,126

Income (Net Revenue)

Galdeford: £191,443

Castle: £168,398

Smithfield: £19,087

On Street: £312,749

Total: £331,836