

From a collective of Proprietors of tourist accommodation – Ludlow.

4th Jan 2019

Clive Wright
Chief Executive
Shropshire Council

Dear Mr Wright

We the undersigned are proprietors and managers of holiday-let establishments in Ludlow who are currently suffering serious adverse effects from recent changes to parking regulations in the town.

Our first warning of impending changes came in the spring of last year in the form of notices that were fixed to parking meters in affected streets. (see image attached). These caused no real concern as they included an assurance that the council would “provide revised parking concessions for hotels, guest houses, bed and breakfast, self-catering and holiday-let establishments.”

Further reassurance came with the publication of the consultation document following the close of public consultation in Sept 2018. This made specific mention of the withdrawal of existing provision of rights to purchase parking permits by holiday self-catering and holiday-let establishments in Low Town Bridgnorth, whereas the proposed changes applying to Ludlow made no mention of any alteration to existing arrangements for such businesses. (see link below).

<https://shropshire.gov.uk/get-involved/bridgnorth-ellesmere-ludlow-and-shrewsbury-various-changes-to-on-street-parking/>

Since then there has been no further consultation nor was there any advance warning of what actually occurred; the sudden and arbitrary withdrawal of such concessions not merely in one specific street in Bridgnorth but in Ludlow and elsewhere.

On raising objections to this completely unexpected loss of a facility that is vital to our business we were, after a lengthy failure to respond, informed that the council had not withdrawn our concessions in regard to scratch-cards since their legal department had since discovered that the concession was technically invalid (other than for one street in Bridgnorth). So, technically, no change had actually occurred and so, again technically, no consultation or forewarning was required, but merely the closing of that awkward Bridgnorth loophole.

Behaviour such as this might well appear acceptable to minds attuned to legal niceties, but it is a clear affront to common sense and decent values. Irrespective of technicalities we were misled. The signs put out in the spring promised us “revised concessions”. Revised is not a synonym for removed. Misled by this and confident that the council would honour their published notice, we did not think it necessary to make appropriate objections during the period of consultation. The published report of this consultation then made no mention of the changes that were secretly proposed (secret is a synonym for undisclosed). So, we still did not object. When our concessions were withdrawn it was a totally unexpected blow that has severely impacted on all our businesses.

We would point out that we were never able to buy scratch-cards on the basis as they were sold to residents. Instead we were charged at a special rate of £40 per book as opposed to £10 per book for residents.

So, prior to issuing these books for visitors the council must have deliberated and decided on that price. It was not a casual oversight, but a deliberate policy that was pursued for a period of many years to the clear profit of the council.

It may be that the council believe that they are sailing with the wind of popular sentiment in treating holiday let businesses in this shoddy manner. The explosive growth of Airbnb in certain towns has certainly caused problems and a case can be made for tighter regulation, but before hitting more well-established, professionally run businesses the council should give consideration to the vital contribution that 'staying visitors' make to the economy of towns such as Ludlow.

A study in 2011 estimated that such 'overnighters' contributed £73million to the economy of South Shropshire. As the attached letter of support from Ludlow Chamber of Commerce makes clear our town cannot afford to lose their custom.

In light of the above we would urge council to immediately re-instate all pre-existing concessions for holiday-let establishments, including the right to purchase scratch-cards, without further delay. The council may or may not have acted according to the letter of the law but has certainly breached trust with its behaviour. We cannot emphasise enough both the consequences of what has been allowed to happen and the urgent need for action.

Overnight guests expect and demand to park within close proximity of their accommodation. A significant number of guests are elderly or infirm and cannot make use of remote car-parks aside from the worry of leaving their cars huge distances away from their accommodation.

All would be prepared to pay a reasonable price to park conveniently close to where they stay. If they cannot do so they will stay elsewhere, in towns that offer a more welcoming approach to visitors and Ludlow will be so much poorer for their absence.

Yours sincerely

Amanda & Andrew Kennedy – The Apartment, Ludlow

Naomi Walker – Chancery House

Rachel & Shaun Greetham – Charlies Cottage

Bronwen Williams – Churchwarden Cottage

Stephanie & Hamish Scott – Corve Cottage

Monica and Roger Curry – Frog Cottage

David Lester – Garden Cottage

Abina & Richard Laishley – The Maltsters House

Raymond Perry – 24 Mill Street

Sarah Khan – 99 Old Street

Helen Davis – Posthorn Cottage

Ian Maddock – River View

Amy and Cedric Bosi – Townhouse & Church Inn

Rosemary Thomas – 19 Upper Linney

Barbara & Andrew Handley – The Vineyard