

**WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**CABINET**  
**22<sup>nd</sup> December 2005**

**Petition – Free Car Parking Stourport Sports Centre**

<b>OPEN</b>	
<b>COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME</b>	A Better Environment
<b>CORPORATE PLAN THEME:</b>	Enabling Community Wellbeing
<b>KEY PRIORITY:</b>	Transport Infrastructure
<b>CABINET MEMBER:</b>	Councillor James Dudley
<b>RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:</b>	Head of Cultural, Leisure and Commercial Services
<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	Andrew Dickens 01562 732900
<b>APPENDICES</b>	None

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide the Cabinet with the background to the Petition that was received at Council on 16<sup>th</sup> November requesting free car parking provision at Stourport Sports Centre.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

**The Cabinet are asked to resolve that:-**

- 2.1 **no action is taken on the request for the provision of free car parking at Stourport Sports Centre**
- 2.2 **the Head of Cultural, Leisure & Commercial Services includes in the Reviews of Fees & Charges for Off Street Car Parking which are due to be presented to Cabinet in January 2006, options for the possible variation of the qualifying criteria for the Senior Citizens' Season Ticket Scheme currently in operation under the Car Park Places Order.**

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Council, at its meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2005, received a petition from users of Stourport Sports Centre calling for free car-parking provision for users of the sports centre.
- 3.2 Attached to the petition, but clearly not part of the petition that was signed by users of the sports centre, was a separate request for the Council to review the current age limit

## **AGENDA ITEM NO 9.1.**

for qualification for the provision of senior citizens' car park season tickets within the district.

- 3.3 The Council, at its meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> November, referred the petition and request for review of senior citizens' car park passes to the Cabinet for further consideration. The Cabinet at their meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2005, instructed the Head of Cultural, Leisure & Commercial Services to prepare a report on the background and implications of the petition and the additional request.

### **4. MAIN PETITION**

- 4.1 It has been the Council's policy since 1974, to provide pay & display car parking at its sports and leisure centres where they are situated within a town centre or at an edge of town centre location. This is the case for both Wyre Forest Glades Leisure Centre and Stourport Sports Centre.
- 4.2 Prior to September 2005, there were two pay & display car parks provided for the benefit of users at Stourport Sports Centre, the first one being situated around the curtilage of the sports' centres sports hall and a second overflow car park which is only operated at peak periods, to the rear of the Old Beams public house.
- 4.3 There was additional land to the rear of the sports centre that was previously included in land leased to Stourport Sports Association and used as an access and egress to the land occupied by the Sports Association and other adjacent properties including Stourport Boat Club and Wyre Forest Sub Aqua Club.
- 4.4 This land was used for access to the rear of Stourport Sports Centre and was released from the lease with Stourport Sports Association on the basis that the Council maintained it for car parking purposes to support Stourport Swifts Football Club and major events at Stourport Boat Club, as well as improving access for deliveries to Stourport Sports Centre. The changes all allowed for clear and defined emergency access to all surrounding properties and the River Severn.
- 4.5 The land in question was incorporated into the Car Park Places Order in 2001 with a view to providing coach parking and additional pay & display parking for the benefit of all surrounding properties.
- 4.6 The land was formally laid out and signage erected to introduce the fees and charges if approved as part of the consolidated Car Park Places Order, with a view to commencing charging in September 2005. Prior to that date, the access road and adjacent tarmaced area had been used for the purpose of car parking charge avoidance on an unofficial basis by users of the sports centre and adjacent properties. The introduction of the policy that was agreed in 2001 lead to the petition that was received by the Council at their meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> November.
- 4.7 Should the request for the provision of free car parking for users of Stourport Sports Centre be granted it will inevitably lead to similar requests from the users of Wyre Forest Glades Leisure Centre in Kidderminster and other private leisure and sports club operators, many of whom rely on the provision of pay & display car parking by Wyre Forest District Council. Also the extension of free car parking within town centres or edge of town centre sites inevitably leads to a migration of other users to the free area

## **AGENDA ITEM NO 9.1.**

in order to avoid car parking charges similar to the unofficial avoidance scheme to which the petition refers.

- 4.8 The income reduction from such a scheme would be considerable and would inevitably put the car park account into deficit which is contrary to Council policy of providing car parking facilities on a breakeven basis and therefore no subsidy was received from the Council Tax payers of the district.
- 4.9 The Council's current policy does allow for dual ticket issuing to allow operators to refund car parking charges where they feel appropriate, however, there are no schemes of this nature currently operating on the Council's operated off street car parks and such a scheme was not included in the Business Plan or proposals from DC Leisure who currently operate Stourport Sports Centre.

### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The projected loss of revenue by providing free car parking at Stourport Sports Centre is estimated to be £10,580 p.a. which would have to be offset by higher than average car park charge increases at other car parks across the district in order to maintain the Council's no subsidy policy.

### **6. REVIEW OF SENIOR CITIZENS' CAR PARK SEASON TICKET ISSUING CRITERIA**

- 6.1 A totally separate point which is raised in the covering letter to the petition from Mrs Mills highlights the issue of pensioners who are not in substantive employment but who are over the age of 60 and under the age of 63 who do not therefore currently qualify for a senior citizens' car park pass. She claims that this creates an inequity for this particular group of users of the Sports & Leisure Centres.
- 6.2 This point is unrelated to the signatures on the petition, which is clearly headed "If you are against paying parking fees at swimming baths sign here". Hence the call for free car parking addressed earlier in this report.
- 6.3 It is possible to review the criteria under the Car Park Places Order for the issuing of senior citizens' car park season tickets, however, these will have financial implications which should be addressed under the current full Review of Car Parking Fees & Charges which is due to be presented to the Cabinet at the January 2006 meeting. It is therefore proposed that the Head of Cultural, Leisure & Commercial Services includes options for reviewing the scheme in order to address the current potential inequity.

### **7. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 Any changes to the current charges and levels of service by the Council would need to be made in accordance with the Council's policy of providing car parking at breakeven.

**8. RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 8.1 There is a risk that now the car parking charges avoidance opportunities around Stourport Sports Centre have been removed, that there may be a small financial barrier to potential use of the Sports Centre facilities. However, given that the number of people signing the Car Park Petition represents only 5% of the total usage of the sports centre facilities, this is not deemed to be significant.

**9. CONCLUSIONS**

- 9.1 In order to maintain the current Council policies, the request for car parking fees to be removed for users of the swimming pool and sports centre facilities at Stourport cannot be justified.
- 9.2 The full implications of the request for the review of the senior citizens' car park season ticket schemes can be assessed as part of the wider Review of Fees & Charges and considered more fully at the Cabinet meeting in January 2006. Any proposals for change are likely to have an impact on other car parking charges throughout the district.

**10. CONSULTEES**

Head of Financial Services  
Head of Legal & Democratic Services

**11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Petition and letter from Mrs Mills presented to Cabinet 16<sup>th</sup> November 2005

AD/JHL  
9<sup>th</sup> December 2005