

**Cllr Bruce Heywood - Chairman of WSC & Cllr Nick Thwaites
Representing the Dulverton & District Ward.**

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28th June 2017

Proposed Off Street Parking Places Order 2017 – consultation response

Dear Bruce,

Having been approached numerous times by residents who use Dulverton car parks it is appropriate as Ward Councillors for the Dulverton & District Ward of West Somerset Council (WSC) we formally register our objections to the Proposed Off Street Parking Places Order 2017 as a response to the consultation process.

We wish to repeat (as expressed during the Full Council Meeting held on the 22nd March 2017) our objections and opposition to the provisions in this document which relate to the changes to the terms & conditions as they pertain to Dulverton car parks.

Specifically the proposals:

- To increase the cost of annual permits from £90 to £210 (be it in 2 steps, the first to £150 in July/August 2017 and the second to £210 in April 2018. This is the equivalent increase in the six-month permit charge and equates to a 230% increase.
- Deny the use of annual and six-month permits in the Lion Stables car park using the justification, it is a "short-term" (whatever that means) car park.
- Removing the Lion Car Park from the named car parks in Dulverton.

On a general level, we object to an increase in charges at a time when WSC are knowingly producing an excessive surplus from car parking. Although it is recognised due to an oversight that a number of items of maintenance have not be cross charged to the car park budget and extra costs will be

expected, however despite this, the surplus "income" being generated seems huge, i.e. over 100% more than the outgoings. The total lack of a breakdown of costs against outgoings only goes to raise concerns, and the question of where is this surplus?

In this case, should not serious consideration be given to reducing car parks charges throughout WSC district as a means of positively encouraging off-street, not on-street parking which is currently clearly visible in the towns and parishes though the district?

The "Statement of Reasons" document, associated with the proposal, in item 4. suggests that bringing the "Dulverton" annual permit in line with other areas is a necessary and presumably a good thing. We would contend that this is an entirely contrived and ill-conceived notion which will produce only negative effects to those who work for the local business and live in the area.

It is clearly indicated in an officer's report to WSC full council there will be an expected reduction in "Dulverton" permits from 147 to perhaps 40 as private individual and businesses no longer purchase permits. Just last month the trend was started as Exmoor National Park Authority announced it will no longer be their practice due to the unreasonable increase in costs to provide permits.

Using the 147 (at the £90/year price) and the estimated new figure if 40 (£210) it can be calculated that there will be a drop in revenue of £5000. It has been the case that Dulverton car parks has for several years sold more annual permits than the rest of West Somerset combined thus demonstrating their popularity at the price charged.

Dulverton Town Council (DTC) under Localism managed the car parks in Dulverton (under a lease agreed jointly between DTC and WSC) successfully for two decades prior to 2016 and during this time the usage was monitored closely, at no time was there any suggestion that permit holders were causing congestion and this is borne out by current usage.

To overcome the concerns being expressed by the local businesses, and the community as a whole the following suggestions should be considered:

1. Designate the Lion car park as a long stay car park, if this is what is needed to enable permits to be used, i.e. if necessary the charges should be the same as the other car parks.
2. To leave or reinstate, the Lion car park into the collective of Dulverton named car parks. (NB: WSC under this TRO will make all of Watchet car parks into one name car park)
3. Allow weekly, monthly, 6 monthly, 12 monthly and shopper permits to be authorised to be used in the Lion Car Park.
4. Further consideration could be given to returning the operational management to DTC - clearly, local control works and did work for a good many years and there is no reason why it should not continue to do so. It has been heard mentioned that DTC got a better deal than other car parking areas. It should be noted that the previous lease was agreed by both parties, i.e. DTC and WSC.

The "Statement of Reasons" document, associated with the proposal, in item 5. suggests that the change in permit use for the Lion Stables car park, "will support the provision of parking close to the town centre for visitors and shoppers". No proper survey has been conducted by WSC to support any of the contentions made in the report.

Dulverton has 108 off-street parking spaces controlled by WSC but there are also more than 30 on-road, time limited (one Hour) spaces. These on-road spaces represent 23% of the overall controlled parking in the Town, a more than adequate provision, closer to the shops than any of the car parks.

There are only three short term car parks in West Somerset, Summerland (Minehead), Doverhay (Porlock) where resident's permits are permitted and Lion Stables in Dulverton. Prior to this proposal, Summerland was the only non-permit short term car park so the suggestion that disallowing permits in short term car parks is the policy is spurious in the extreme.

As members of WSC, we are concerned at what can only be described as a half-hearted approach to consultation. In a previously consolation, a sister statutory council, in this case, Dulverton Town Council had to ask to be consulted and this produced a single email asking its opinion!! Having responded no acknowledgement or further communication followed. Asking a question is one thing and a step in the right direction but having asked the question than to go on to ignore the answer makes a complete mockery of the process and our council. It is not unexpected to presume this is because the response was not what WSC wanted to hear. It would be good if consideration was given this time to consultation responses.

In summary, it is our contention that these proposals as they relate to Dulverton are unhelpful, unnecessary and whether by design or not, will cause the maximum amount of disruption to normal operation of the town, its residents and businesses. Due to the virtual non existence of a bus service serving the town and outlying areas, those who live and work here are "forced" to use a vehicle and those vehicles need to park. It is very difficult to see a financial benefit to West Somerset and the minimal administrative inconvenience, which could have been avoided altogether by not cancelling the lease held by DTC, is not a reasonable excuse for such draconian measures.

This is not about parity or being a special case, although it is very clear that Towns and Parishes throughout WSC are being treated differently and "special cases" do exist, (why should they not because circumstances ARE different in each town/parish) contrary to that being expressed by WSC.

Consequently the over used maximum of "one size fits all" used to justify these changes does not apply.

Yours sincerely

Nick & Bruce