

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Highways and Transport Committee**
held on Thursday, 25th January, 2024 in the The Capesthorpe Room - Town
Hall, Macclesfield SK10 1EA

PRESENT

Councillor C Browne (Chair)
Councillor L Crane (Vice-Chair)
Councillors L Braithwaite, R Chadwick, P Coan, A Coiley, H Faddes, A Gage,
C Hilliard, A Moran, H Moss, J Priest and M Sewart

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Tom Moody, Director of Highways and Infrastructure
Richard Hibbert, Head of Strategic Transport and Parking
Domenic De Bechi, Head of Highways
Mandy Withington, Legal Services
Andrew Poynton, Senior Planning and Highways Lawyer
Steve Reading, Principal Accountant
Wendy Broadhurst, Finance Partner
Lorraine Rushton, Parking Services Manager
Mark Fleming, Project Manager, Transport
Katie Small, Democratic Services Manager

18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

19 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

20 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2023 be approved
as a correct record

21 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

Ms Carol Jones attended to speak in relation to item 6 - Notice of Motion:
£2 Bus Fare Cap and asked how the committee expected to increase bus
use and awareness of the £2 fare cap to those who were not on social
media.

In response, the Chair advised that the Council was working with local bus
operators through the Enhanced Partnership Board and Forum, and the

approach to engagement and promotion was set out at paragraph 15 of the report. Some examples included all member bulletins, Town and Parish Council newsletters, internally through the staff newsletter, local bus user groups and also increasing public awareness through vehicles operating in Cheshire East including Flexi Link and Ansa refuse collection vehicles.

Councillor Valerie Herbert (Prestbury Parish Council) spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Councillor Herbert stated that the Parish Council was mindful that Cheshire East needed to find money somewhere but believed there were better options than imposing car park charges. The revised proposal for free parking at Springfield School at pick up and drop off times was appreciated but did not allay fears. Prestbury Parish Council was strenuously opposed to car parking charges and felt there would be a negative impact on the economy of the village, both from a customer and employee perspective. Businesses had worked hard to recover from the pandemic and were dealing with the cost of living. Staff recruitment could become an issue and customers were likely to choose out of town shopping areas with free parking. Rail travellers had 'voted with their feet' when charges were introduced at Prestbury station a few years ago. Walking in many parts of Prestbury was not an option due to narrow or non-existent pavements. Voluntary organisations could seek alternative venues or see a dramatic fall in membership which may make them unviable. Generally poor mobile phone signal could mean not collecting as much money as envisaged. Residents may visit doctors in Alderley Edge or Bollington, both with free parking, leading to a loss in health services. Some residents had no parking for their homes and would need affordable permits to continue parking in the nearest car park. Councillor Herbert suggested that the committee should instruct officers to engage with Town and Parish Councils to find a better solution.

Mr Carol Hamilton spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Mr Hamilton stated that he had been Chair of Prestbury Business Forum and worked to ensure the sustainability of the village's commercial centre which was small, with only 29 commercial premises. The loss of shops in the village would have a greater impact than in neighbouring towns. Prestbury had the added challenge of being surrounded by greenbelt which meant no population growth. Given these factors, Prestbury was not an attractive location for prospective business owners. Many of the business owners were approaching retirement age and replacements would need to be found. The two selling points that had been used in recruiting replacements were free parking and the affluence of the local community. If the proposed parking charges were introduced, the already difficult business environment would get worse. It was accepted that the Council needed to raise more revenue but felt that residents of Prestbury were paying a fair share with per capita residential rates payments being the highest in the borough. It was asked that the committee give authority to officers to discuss other options with the Town and Parish Council.

Councillor John Stewart (Bollington Town Council) spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Councillor Stewart stated that Bollington Town Council and the vast majority of residents wanted the committee to remove Bollington from the proposals. The car park affected is at the heart of the community with no on street parking nearby. Town vitality would be adversely impacted. Nearly 1700 signed a petition against the charges. Bollington was the only town without a rail station in the consultation and had suffered severe cuts in public transport. As a linear town, Councillor Stewart felt that Bollington should be given special consideration. Many residents did not have off road parking and relied on public car parks. These proposals go against the neighbourhood plan to progress standard residential and public parking provision within Bollington and would have a severe long-term detriment to the community. Bollington Town Council recognised that Cheshire East had not had appropriate funding over many years and had a significant challenge and the Town Council was open to considering alternatives.

Councillor Michael Unett (Alsager Town Council) spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Councillor Unett stated that the charging proposal would have a significant impact on the vitality of Alsager and would impact neighbouring areas that use Alsager as a key service centre. The impact of charges would be significant and local businesses were already struggling with increased overheads and online competition. Mitigations for some schools and residential parking were welcomed but there was no mitigation for the displacement of cars on neighbouring streets and existing dangerous parking could be exacerbated. There was concern that the consultation may not have followed the principles outlined by the government's consultation principles 2018 or the local government association guidance section 4. If the additional proposals were implemented, it would negate the mitigations. It was felt that this was not a town by town review but a 'one size fits all' policy driven by revenue not fairness. 96% of the consultation respondents were against the proposals. There was significant strength of feeling against proposals and Councillor Unett urged the committee to listen to residents and reject the proposals.

Michael Willcocks (Audlem Medical Practice) spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Mr Willcocks stated that the GP partners and practice manager submitted an impact statement during the consultation phase. The car park used by patients at the practice enabled a holistic level of care. The GP practice was fulfilling over 500 appointments per week which was 10% of its patient list every week. The impact statement listed in detail the ways in which all patients would be affected and the vulnerability of the more elderly population and those in social housing. There was also a concern about the impact on staff retention. Mr Willcocks stated that good health was not just determined by access to primary care but also access to clubs, societies,

support groups and activities to improve health which was supported by the adjacent car parks.

Councillor Robert Douglas (Congleton Town Council) spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Councillor Douglas disagreed with the assumption that, after increasing parking charges in Congleton by 150% -169%, demand would only reduce by 5%. Councillor Douglas felt that the views of residents had been ignored and asked that the committee would have a named vote.

Councillor Suzy Firkin (Congleton Town Council) spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Councillor Firkin stated that 629 Congleton residents responded to the consultation and Congleton Town Council submitted a detailed response. Many suggestions were made so that the proposed changes were practical and did not impact those who could least afford. Little change had been made to the proposals following these suggestions. Councillor Firkin was concerned to see proposals for delegated powers to bring in further charging, including extending the charging period to 10pm which would impact town centre residents who made use of overnight car parks due to a lack of parking at their homes. Councillor Firkin felt that these changes needed to be assessed by those with relevant local knowledge.

Councillor Chris Jackson (Holmes Chapel Parish Council) spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Councillor Jackson stated that Holmes Chapel Parish Council was frustrated and concerned that the recommendations did not reflect the views expressed in the consultation responses. The introduction of charging to the town's two small car parks would have an impact on the local economy. As a local service centre, the provision of free parking attracted visitors to use local businesses. Strong representation had been received from those businesses about the impact on customers and employees and the Parish Council endorsed those concerns. There were also concerns about the displaced parking that would result and that attempting to prevent this through additional restrictions would exacerbate the situation. Despite a number of Freedom of Information requests and a meeting with officers, the Parish Council remained unconvinced that the data with regard to both revenue and cost were reliable. Councillor Jackson believed this should be subject to further review taking into account local circumstances.

Sue Helliwell spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Ms Helliwell stated that Cheshire East had issued a press release on 17 January which she felt indicated that it was a foregone conclusion that parking charges were coming to Alsager despite over 95% of consultation responses objecting. Ms Helliwell felt that the respondents' views had been overwhelmingly ignored. The car parks were also used for school pick up and drop offs and access to a food bank. Market towns needed support to bring shoppers in and protect jobs.

Brian Bugeja spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review) on behalf of a group in Audlem set up to challenge the parking charges. Mr Bugeja asked what the reasons were for the committee relying on a flawed parking strategy report and stated that Audlem would be the only rural community to have its free parking removed. 98% of consultation respondents in Audlem were against the charges and 1,800 signed a petition. The charges were proposed to start from 8am although the school drop off time was 8.45am. Audlem did not have access to the same levels of public transport as other towns in the borough.

The Chair responded that the parking strategy reports were drafted to inform the MTFS proposal that was agreed at full Council in February 2023. This was designed to assess current parking arrangements and usage. The basis for recommending the charges was to amend the legacy charging review in accordance with the high level parking strategy, adopted in 2019 as part of the local transport plan. This strategy established a principal that the use of car parks was a discretionary service provided by the Council. As all car parks incur costs to maintain, a number of these costs were disproportionate in rural locations. Parking charges in themselves did not prevent anyone receiving or accessing health services and all blue badge holders were offered free parking with no time limit on Cheshire East managed car parks and there were no proposals to change that. Regarding school pick up and drop off issues highlighted during the consultation, proposals had been amended to accommodate this but for Audlem only 6 of the responses received mentioned this issue.

Geoff Seddon (Audlem Parish Council) spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review) Mr Seddon stated that he was opposed to charges on Audlem's only public car park and felt that the Jacobs review seemed to have been a desktop exercise which contained errors and no road safety assessment appeared to have taken place. The Council's road safety officer who was aware of the existing road safety issues in Audlem was not consulted. There was limited on street car parking with no prospect of providing any more in the village centre. Jacobs had stated there would be a 20% displacement of vehicles from the car park which was up to 13 vehicles every hour and vehicles already parked on double yellow lines. Mr Seddon felt that if charges were introduced the viability of the independent shops would be under serious threat and it would be likely that residents would travel to towns where there was free parking at supermarkets but more importantly the medical practice would be impacted by the charges. Mr Seddon requested that the Committee deferred the decision on Audlem until a road safety assessment had been seen by the committee.

Councillor Laurence Clarke (Poynton Town Council) spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Councillor Clark stated that Poynton Town Council and the people of Poynton were concerned that proposal to abolish free parking at the only

public car park in the centre of the village would seriously damage the local economy. Faced with charges, many people would prefer to drive a few miles to park for free. The Committee were reminded that a large part of Poynton's car park was leased to Waitrose which allowed two hours free parking and would reduce the number of people using the Cheshire East section of the car park. Cheshire East figures showed that the charges would only raise about £37,500 and after paying 20% in back to HMRC, would only leave £31,269 and then the cost of issuing tickets and staff and the paying staff to enforce would have to be deducted

Councillor Tim Wheatcroft (Sandbach Town Council) spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Councillor Wheatcroft made a request that enough information was provided for local councils to have the opportunity to consider carpark charging to be met from the precept before a decision on parking charges was made. There was no response from Cheshire East to the widespread concerns as to the likely effect of the proposal on the town centres economic recovery, recovery that a Highways proposal was supposed to support. Highways proposals obsess with the turnover of cars, double yellow lines, and restrictions that have been managed without for years and were not policed very well anyway.

In response the Chair referred Councillor Wheatcroft to recommendation 5 of the agenda which would enable conversations and detailed discussions and negotiations with town and parish councils to take place over potentially transferring. So subject to agreement by the committee or recommendation 5 officers would be able to go in to detailed discussions not only with Sandbach but other town and parish councils, who have an expressed an interest as well.

Diane Tams spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Ms Tams stated that whilst there was understanding in respect of the need for financial cutbacks and recognising the challenges faced by the Council, the Council was asked to consider the distinct differences between a village and the town. The introduction of parking charges designed for larger urban areas could have a disproportionate impact on the community and Councillors were asked to take in to account the specific needs and challenges faced by smaller communities.

In response the Chair stated that there were 2 Cheshire East Council operated car parks in Holmes Chapel which incurred costs of operation and in accordance with the Council's policy, consideration needed to be given to car park users in meeting or helping to make those costs. Recommendation 5 of the agenda would enable the Council to enter into negotiations with the Parish Council regarding asset transfer. The Council had reflected on Holmes Chapel as a smaller town centre by recommending that it was not placed in the higher tariff band.

Peter Offer spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Mr Offer stated that he was amazed to see that Cheshire East charged itself rates on its own car parks, which didn't seem to be solving its problems altogether. A car park was a road in practice and in law and its sole use was for parking cars. For example, in Sandbach there was delineated linear parking in various places, but no rates were charged on that which were set out as a car park. The only difference was that those roads were through roads.

In response the Chair stated that Business rates were collected by local authorities, but they were charged by central government on all assets that were not used for domestic purposes and there was no exception made for local authorities. Valuations for business rates were set by the Valuations Office agency. The Council did not calculate its own business rates, for every pound that Cheshire East Council collected in business rates approximately 70 pence was passported directly to national government so there was a real cost involved there and it was not a case of the Council recycling its own money.

Lucy Garner spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Ms Garner stated that Cheshire East were not considering the long-term impact of their short-term goals. If small businesses were forced to close because of lack of footfall it would create a bigger, more devastating problem and the knock-on effect of the charges would be devastating. The corporate plan objectives were not met by this proposal 1) A thriving and sustainable place - A great place for people to work, live, and visit. Ms Garner stated that people do not visit ghost towns and they were not good locations for businesses due to parking. 2) Welcoming, safe and clean neighbourhoods – Ms Garner stated that If shops closed towns would decline, they would become unsafe and undesirable places. 3) Reduce impact on the environment – Ms Garner stated that with no local town worth visiting, car travel would increase to free out of town supermarkets increasing pollution which undermined the objective of being a carbon neutral Council by 2025.

Poverty had increased according to the Councils JSNA report so risking town centre closure, there would be reduced access to local services which would disproportionately affect the poor and disadvantaged.

Kathryn Flavell spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Ms Flavell stated that Cheshire East Council were not saying that there was going to be no parking. The most important point was that either nobody paid or everybody paid. Crewe and Nantwich, had been paying for parking for decades, and those people, those residents, particularly in Crewe, which was one of the most deprived towns in the country, had been supporting all of the towns that had enjoyed free parking. Nantwich was a thriving town and that had had parking for a long time. Even if people travelled out of the area to a free car park it was going to cost them more than what it would cost to park in Sandbach. If people were so passionate about independent shops surely

they would not boycott them because they had been asked to pay 60 pence for parking, how was that helping local residents?

Councillor Sarah Bennett-Wake spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Councillor Bennett Wake stated that in respect of parking charges having a detrimental impact on local businesses, this had not been the case in Macclesfield. With one in five councils struggling because of the cost of living crisis, high inflation and 63% less funding from government, it only seemed fair that everyone should pay for parking spaces. It was a national issue and the autumn statement provided no new funding for local authorities despite the cross-party county Councils Network highlighting councils were under extreme financial pressure, facing a total of 4 billion funding deficits over three years.

Councillor Ken Edwards spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Councillor Edwards requested that line 10 of the Charging Proposal be dropped which would introduce charges to Pool Bank Car Park Bollington. Councillor Edwards stated that there was no off road accommodation for cars and narrow streets which were heavily parked on. There were electric vehicle charging points on the car park which were paid for by Bollington Town Council. When car park charging had been considered previously it had been rejected on the grounds of the overwhelming service to residents and businesses that the car park free at the point of use offers, which meant it got maximum use for the economy at any point of time, thus freeing seriously overcrowded streets. The Committee were asked to have the long-term interest of the Bollington Community in mind and drop the proposal.

Councillor John Place spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Councillor Place stated that his understanding was that car parking charges had not been put up since 2018. Further opportunity for town and parish councils to talk about the devolution issue was welcomed. Residents were fearful of the impact of the charges and feel like the threat of Section 114 and revenue which was the driver. Councillor Place stated that what the report had done was it had got a uniform view across the whole of Cheshire East of what the issues were and it was hoped that there would be space beyond the next consultation period for whatever decision the committee made, so that those conversations could take place because a lot of the residents and businesses involved in Bollington were prepared in other ways to help with the financial situation.

Councillor Rachel Bailey spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Councillor Bailey thanked the public speakers for speaking at the committee meeting, and for raising their concerns. Councillor Bailey stated that the concerns which were akin to those raised when green bin charges were implemented within Cheshire East, which Councillor Bailey said was decreed as being agreed at budget setting in 2023. Councillor Bailey said that she believed that Councils and

Local Governments had a responsibility to understand the areas which their decisions effect and respond appropriately.

Councillor Bailey stated that the concerns were those similar to the “pay to pray” campaign for Sunday parking charges previously in Crewe and Nantwich, and residents of Audlem would have to “pay to mourn” and raised concerns about the cumulative cost associated for those who visited cemeteries to mourn each day. Councillor Bailey asked Members to consider deferral as she stated there were no assurances regarding the return to the Council’s finances, the strategy was incomplete and contained errors, and mention of the Cheshire East Rural Action Plan was missing.

Councillor Bailey asked Members if they were aware of the Rural Action Plan, and whether comments made about Councillor Moreton not being able to serve on the Committee of which they were a member, made them feel under pressure to support the recommendations. Councillor Bailey asked what would happen if the scheme didn’t return the financial benefit needed, and the impact of this on the Council’s reputation?

Councillor Rob Moreton spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Councillor Moreton stated that if he were still a member of the Highways and Transport Committee that he would vote against the proposals. Councillor Moreton said that over 600 residents from Congleton took part in the consultation, with over 400 of those commenting on the Roe Street car park, which only had 25 spaces, which were used mainly by those visiting the nearby medical centre. Councillor Moreton stated that he was uncomfortable with the Council taxing the sick to park there, and asked how cost effective it was to install a machine on a car park with only 25 spaces?

Councillor Moreton asked Members to look again at this car park and asked for it to remain free, stating that they shouldn’t be charged for being ill.

Councillor Moreton stated that residents would accept an inflationary increase to parking fees, but 150% was too high, and that those who parked in those car parks would have to decide between paying double to park, or buying lunch, which he said would seriously harm the revenue of local shops and the high street, which were struggling already.

Councillor Moreton understood that the Council was struggling due to a lack of funding from central government, but stated that the Council should not lose sight that residents were already going through a cost-of-living crisis and needed support.

Councillor Moreton said that the library made Councillors and residents feel their views were listened to, and recommendations were changed and aligned with what was suggested, but in his view, the car parking consultation was different and risked putting people off taking part in future

consultations. Councillor Moreton said that Congleton, Sandbach, Holmes Chapel, Alsager, and other surrounding areas felt their voices had not been listed to.

Councillor Sue Adams spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Councillor Adams stated that she did not believe that her, or that of Disley Parish Council's pre-consultation or consultation comments had been listened to. Councillor Adams said that she had emailed Cheshire East Council in September 2023, saying that the number of parking spaces in the August 2023 report was incorrect, which would lead to an overstatement of predicted income. Councillor Adams stated that Cheshire East Council would not be able to charge for parking spaces owned by Disley Parish Council or Peaks and Plains Housing.

Councillor Adams said that there were logistical problems with car park charges in Disley and that she had invited Cheshire East officers to Disley to explain the issues but had not received a reply. Councillor Adams stated that shops and other businesses would be adversely impacted with many are already struggling to survive.

Councillor Adams said there had been much talk about equity in charging for parking, but market forces were much more relevant in Disley, which was about 2 miles away from free parking in neighbouring towns, and Disley would likely lose business to those places and Cheshire East would lose business rates.

Councillor Adams said some residents were struggling to do their shopping and that the Community Centre and library users would be adversely impacted.

Councillor Adams said a key priority of the Parish Council's, health and well-being agenda was to reduce social isolation and promote social inclusion; the car parks were used for patients at Schoolhouse surgery, parents of Disley Primary School pupils for dropping off and collecting children, carers visiting Peaks and Plains, social housing.

Councillor Adams said that parking charged in Cheshire East would make a minimal contribution to the Council budget.

Councillor Adams said that health and social care services have many volunteers in Disley who helped to provide social support for vulnerable residents, and the Parish Council worked with the local GP practice and other organizations to improve the health and wellbeing and for residents, much of this support was based from the community hub. Councillor Adams said that parking charges would undermine their work and therefore adversely impact budgetary situation. Councillor Adams said that the centre of Disley was very congested and an air quality management area and car parking charges would make the situation worse because it would encourage, and increase, parking on-street.

Councillor Adams said that the proposals were not open, fair, or green.

Councillor Nicola Cook spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Councillor Cook said no Councillor became a Councillor wanting to impact the health, livelihood and wellbeing of residents, and that as a Council they had a responsibility for a budget of over £300,000,000, their role was to ensure that they were sensitive to the needs of local communities.

Councillor Cook said that Sandbach was a historic market town which was based on the concept of free parking. Councillor Cook said that the secondary schools, health centre, independent, shops and housing were based on the concept of free car parking and the reality of the proposals would be that teachers, healthcare assistants, shop workers, would be spending an extra £500 a year on car parking at a time when which could be devastating for many residents.

Councillor Cook said that she understood how difficult things were for residents, and over 3000 residents in Sandbach were strongly against car parking charges.

Councillor Cook said that whilst the consultation indicated that officers had listened and incorporated feedback, she said that her own responses had not been considered and that the consultation was ignored.

Councillor Cook said that the car parking consultation did not mention Cheshire East's Business Vitality Plan which stated that free car parking should be protected in Sandbach, and the Sandbach neighbourhood plan. Councillor Cook also said that the consultation ignored safety concerns, which would be caused by "Sandbach Common" being used as a large car park throughout the day by drivers wishing to ignore car parking charges.

Councillor Cook encouraged the committee to review these recommendations.

Councillor Janet Clowes spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Councillor Clowes thanked those who had made the journey to Macclesfield to speak at the meeting.

Councillor Clowes said that Appendix C of the report identified the quarterly and annual permit scheme on specific car parks in Cheshire East, but had been unable to find the following information:

What rationale had been applied to each car park that qualified it for permit use? What determined the subscription rate mentioned? Was there mention of a three, six or nine month permit fee?

Councillor Clowes said that Cheshire East permits related to specific vehicles and car parks and suggested that this was an income limiting deterrent to permit subscriptions. Councillor Clowes said that Northumberland County Council operated a system which enabled residents to park in any car park across their council area, provided each

car park was within the same tier and was well subscribed, meaning that their permit fees were far lower than those being proposed in Cheshire East.

Councillor Clowes said that the price of permits was important in relation to introducing a cash free payment that may be attracted to those who preferred not to use cards or phone apps.

Councillor Clowes noted that the Committee discussed the Notice of Motion submitted by herself and Councillor Sewart, at the July Council relating to the National Parking Platform (NPP) which the committee resolved to note, but not join, due to financial implications, and an existing contract which expired in October, and that the Committee also resolved to monitor the NPPs in September. Councillor Clowes noted that recommendation 12 in the report acknowledged the annual savings that may be made by moving to a cash free system and suggested this may be higher if the prepaid permit scheme was reconfigured to incentivize its use.

Councillor Clowes said that there were still no comments on the savings which may be made in terms of enforcement and income from more effective enforcement remittance, for example via vehicle licence recognition, scanning or scan permit cards.

Councillor Clowes said that there were pilots in place to be able to model these impacts and asked that officers do so as part of the early 2024-2025 preparatory.

Councillor Clowes spoke in relation to agenda item 9 (Third Financial Review 2023/2024). Councillor Clowes said that no reference had been made in the report to costs necessary to prepare the lane rental scheme database, or the submission to the Secretary of readiness for 2024-2025 despite this budget amendment being approved by Council in February 2023.

Councillor Clowes said it would be a useful income whilst also improving the efficiency of rogue management for residents and road users. Councillor Clowes said that there was an addendum to that amendment now, because as of the 15th January 2024, the government announced an open consultation on fines and lane rental surplus funds, which included the introduction of a digital service that was used by every Utility Company, Highway Authority and Contractors in England to plan and manage road works.

Councillor Clowes said that every highway authority operated a permit scheme, which allowed for the proactive planning and management of works which had been proven to reduce the impacts of works on congestion.

Councillor Clowes said that the lane rental scheme would allow authorities to charge up to £2500 a day for works on the busiest roads at the busiest times.

Councillor Clowes said that the actions she would like the Committee to look at, was if they were in support of implementing this programme at pace in 2024-2025, so that the Council responded properly to the Government Street works open consultation.

Councillor Clowes said that if the proposed measures were applied, it would serve to significantly increase revenue.

Councillor Anderson spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Councillor Anderson said that she believed that Town and Parish Councils were asked if they wanted to take over car parks, but did not think that any did.

Councillor Anderson said that Wilmslow had always had car parking charges and Wilmslow Town Council had looked at what could be done to improve the town's footfall. Councillor Anderson said that Wilmslow instigated a "Town Centre Manager" which now supported the town. Councillor Anderson said that she would recommend town centres putting a bid in place for a Town Centre Manager for their towns.

Councillor Anderson spoke in relation to agenda item 6 (Notice of Motion: £2 Bus Fare Cap). Councillor Anderson said that she was pleased to see the £2 bus fare cap extended to the end of the year and was pleased to see that the Council are looking at how to advertise it more widely. Councillor Anderson said that she hoped Cheshire East would consider working with Town and Parish Councils and Ward Councillors to get the message out aside from social media.

Councillor Anderson said that information on the usage of bus stops should be examined to see where bus routes can be made more efficient, and hoped that officers would look at how to get more residents to and from work and back home from work on buses.

Councillor Anderson asked that officers look at what can be done with large employment sites such as Astra Zeneca, Royal London, or Barclays, to encourage commuting by bus.

Councillor John Bird spoke in relation to agenda item 5 (Medium Term Financial Strategy - Parking Review). Councillor Bird said that he would like to thank the officer for the detailed report and commended those trying to find a way forward through the difficult times the Council has ahead.

Councillor Bird said that Cheshire East's Local Authority Plan stated it would deliver sustainable growth to meet the aspirations of the borough. Councillor Bird said that the report made references to enabling and supporting individual towns and villages to ensure that good quality, well designed, sustainable development was at the heart of the local plan. Councillor Bird said that if Cheshire East were to break up local towns, that was not going happen.

Councillor Bird said that he did not think that the needs of residents had been properly looked into and that roads would become unsafe as roads would become clogged as residents wouldn't use the car parks, and therefore income would not be generated.

Councillor Liz Wardlaw spoke in relation to agenda item 9 (Third Financial Review 2023/2024). Councillor Wardlaw said that in her ward of Odd Rode they had winter gritting removed, had numerous potholes, roads were in a poor state, had very few buses, and had one Cheshire East car park which housed six cars which was in a very poor state.

Councillor Wardlaw said that residents travelled to Alsager and Congleton in the main to visit facilities such as GPs, shops or chemists. Councillor Wardlaw said that Congleton nurses had approached her and advised that the fees for daily parking would add £1000 a year to their costs. Councillor Wardlaw asked whether cash payment machines would be available. Councillor Wardlaw said charging parents to park to drop off their children was unrealistic and said that the Council was further going to debilitate the high street economy by charging people who went out in the evening.

Councillor Wardlaw said that the committee system was currently under review but what needed to be reviewed was the removal of Councillor Rob Moreton from the Highways and Transport committee.

Councillor Wardlaw said that, with reference to agenda item number 8, the committee must scrutinise its decision making.

22 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY - PARKING REVIEW

The Committee considered the report which set out proposals on the implementation of changes to the public parking provision in Cheshire East, following statutory consultation.

There was an extensive debate, during which the following points were raised:

- The provision of car parks was a discretionary service.
- Cheshire East had increased parking charges only once since 2009 despite inflation increasing.
- The proposals were seeking to address unfairness with some areas of the borough paying for parking while others did not.
- The Council was experiencing financial challenges as a result of costs incurred in petitioning for HS2.
- There was unprecedented demand for special educational needs provision which was affected the Council's budget.
- The Council was experiencing challenges as a result of high interest rates and inflation.
- The Council was incurring costs of £400,000 for car parks that they were receiving no revenue for.

- The proposals had responded to consultation feedback by not recommending on-street 30 minute waiting limits and retaining the 'free after 3pm' initiative.
- Savings would need to be met from other services if these proposals were not approved.
- There was evidence of other towns within the borough, such as Nantwich, not being negatively impacted by parking charges.

During the debate, amendments to recommendations 1-11 were proposed and seconded which sought to include the following wording:

That a half hour tariff should be available in at least one car park in each town or parish in the borough.

That pre-paid tickets should be usable on all Cheshire East car parks.

The proposer and seconder of the recommendations agreed to accept the amendments, subject to the latter including the wording that *'this recommendation is added to the work programme as a matter requiring urgent attention'*.

The amendments therefore became part of the substantive motion.

Following debate on the substantive recommendations, these were put to the vote and recommendations 1 – 11 were carried by majority.

During the debate on recommendations 12 – 16 an amendment was proposed and seconded which was that:

that payment by cash should be retained on at least one car per town or parish.

The proposer and seconder of the recommendations agreed to accept the amendment.

The amendment therefore became part of the substantive motion.

Following debate on recommendations 12 – 16, these were put to the vote and recommendations 12, 14, 15 and 16 were carried by majority.

Recommendation 13 was lost.

RESOLVED:

That the Highways and Transport committee:

1. Consider the outcomes of the statutory consultation on proposals to extend and revise the Council's Pay & Display parking provision with a view to ensure car parks are provided and managed more consistently and equitably throughout the Borough.

2. Subject to a half hour tariff being available in at least one car park in each town or parish in the borough, approve the introduction of changes to the Councils parking regime, in accordance with the measures defined in Appendix 3 of this report and authorise the Director of Governance and Compliance to make all necessary arrangements to bring into effect the recommendations.

3. Note that a series of mitigation measures have been identified to manage any potential displacement of car parking as a result of these changes. Members are advised that these measures are expected to require further statutory consultation prior to the making of relevant Traffic Regulation Order. As such ward councillors and town/parish councils will be consulted as part of these procedures.

4. Authorise the Director of Highways and Infrastructure to monitor the impact of these changes, commence the necessary statutory consultations and implement these mitigation measures where there is evidence of a need to do

so. Monitoring will take place before and after the implementation of new parking charges to assess any impacts arising.

5. Authorise the Executive Director of Place to engage and agree devolution of any car parks to Town and Parish Councils, where they have expressed a willingness to pursue this option, noting that these negotiations will be pursued so that Cheshire East Council is neither better nor worse off than if proposals for car parking charges were implemented. Otherwise, in circumstances where a car park is underutilised and demand can be met in other facilities, arrange for the closure and disposal of car parks. Subject to approval, town and parish councils will be informed of these opportunities to ensure they may fully consider these options.

6. Agree that the legacy arrangement to refund parking costs for users of Crewe and Nantwich leisure centres be terminated, to ensure consistency with other Council leisure centres.

7. Authorise the Executive Director of Place to review parking charges annually in future years as part of the annual review of Fees and Charges. These reviews will take account of annual inflation and other relevant factors, and Committee will be notified of future changes in advance of a statutory consultation period.

8. Agree that proposals relating to the future provision of staff and member parking permits be subject to consultation with staff, members and representative bodies as part of updating the Council's Corporate Travel Plan.

9. Note that the initial trial of demand-responsive parking tariffs will commence following the opening of the new Royal Arcade MSCP in Crewe.

10. Note the implementation plan for these proposals, which is designed to provide the maximum timely contribution to the MTFS outcomes.

11. Subject to decisions on the earlier recommendations in the report, approve a Supplementary Capital Estimate to provide for the costs of extending pay and display parking provision and associated mitigation measures, which are estimated to be £0.9m. This will be funded by prudential borrowing and repaid through service budgets.

11a. That the possibility of pre-paid tickets being usable on all Cheshire East car parks be added to the work programme for further consideration on 4 April 2024.

12. That payment by cash should be retained on at least one car per town or parish Pay & Display car parks. Users will have the options to pay by card, phone or contract parking permit purchase at all other car parks. Removing the need to collect cash payments will reduce operating costs (cash collection) by circa £100,000 annually. Mindful that cash payments are a high proportion of parking transactions in Cheshire East, typically over 40% of total payments; consideration of moving to cashless payment should take account of the progress of the National Parking Platform (NPP). This is intended to provide a consistent parking App for users nationwide. Timing a transition to cashless to coincide with NPP will enable the Council to draw on promotional, awareness-raising media supporting the national initiative.

13. Revoking the offer of “4 free days” that is currently available to town and parish councils where charges apply would increase annual revenues by £120,000 (estimated). This offer would be retained in circumstances where the town or parish council offered to fund the revenue lost by suspending parking charges for 4 days.

14. Introduction of a Sunday parking charge could yield additional revenues,
as follows: Option B is based on weekday parking charges being extended to Sundays which is estimated to yield £180,000 per annum (full year effect). There will be additional operational costs for enforcement cover during Sundays, in order to ensure compliance with the extended charging periods. In this regard, a flat daily charge on Sundays is preferable as it minimises the requirement of extra enforcement patrols.

15. Extension of parking charges to cover evening periods (6pm to 10pm) is estimated to yield annual revenues of £300,000. There will be additional operational costs for enforcement cover during evenings, in order to ensure compliance with extended charging periods.

The meeting was adjourned for a short break.

Councillor P Coan left the meeting and did not return.

23 NOTICE OF MOTION: £2 BUS FARE CAP

The Committee considered a report in response to the Notice of Motion proposed at Full Council on 18 October 2023 which asked for the Director of Highways and Infrastructure to develop and launch a publicity strategy to locally promote the extension and usage of the £2 bus fare cap. The motion was proposed by Councillor A Gage and seconded by Councillor H Moss.

There was an option to use some of the next tranche of Bus Service Improvement Plan Plus (BSIP+) funding and this had been discussed at a recent Enhanced Partnership Board where operators were widely supportive of the proposal. The public strategy was outlined which included promotion through social media, Town and Parish newsletter, local bus user groups and advertising on vehicles who operated on routes in Cheshire East.

Members welcomed any scheme which increased bus patronage following the loss of funds related to HS2 but agreed that there needed to be more long term investment and commitment to a sustainable bus network.

Resolved (unanimously):

That the Highways and Transport Committee

1. Note the update on the £2 Fare Cap applying to local buses in England.
2. Endorse that the Council continues to work in partnership with local bus operators to publicise the fare cap.
3. Note the high level of public awareness of the fare cap and comment on the potential future opportunities for the Council to promote it further.

24 HIGHWAYS AND INFRASTRUCTURE: 2023/24 MID-YEAR REVIEW

The Committee received a report on the performance to mid-year across Infrastructure and Highways services for 2023-4. The report provided an update on activity across the service and progress of the delivery of the maintenance and management services delivering major infrastructure projects and development of bus services, cycling schemes and management cost services.

Members welcomed the significant amount of work carried out around Active Travel with routes and projects around Macclesfield, Crewe and Handforth. In response to a question raised about what the timescales were for the commencement of the work in Handforth on the Manchester

Road project it was agreed that a written response would be provided outside of the meeting.

In relation to a question raised in respect of whether trees were being replaced which had either fallen down due to the weather or were diseased, officers reported that it was dependent on location and that it would be considered on a case by case basis as it was a complicated process.

The Committee thanked the team for all of their hard work and welcomed the news that the Council was bidding for further funding from the Environment agency to address flooding issues.

RESOLVED:

That the Highways and Transport Committee

1. Note the performance of Infrastructure and Highways Service to mid-year 2023-4.
2. Note the on-going work of the Highways Service to support delivering the Council's Brighter Futures customer strategy.

25 LEAD LOCAL FLOOD AUTHORITY: 2023/24 ANNUAL REVIEW

The Committee received a report on activity in relation to Cheshire East Council's role as Lead Local Flood Authority for Quarter 1 and 2 (mid-year) 2023-24.

Four key areas were outlined from the report which were:

- An improvement in responding to planning applications which had increased to over 90%
- Preparations were underway to provide planning advice through an approval body which would allow the Council to influence on how developments go in and the drainage measures they would bring in the future.
- Preparing and Maintaining a Local Flood Risk Management Strategy.
- Applying for retrospective schemes which may allow the Council to recover money for betterment that it had previously spent.

In response to Members comment and questions officers reported that

- In respect to highways maintenance a commissioned service was delivered through a thin client contract management team.
- In relation to concerns about surface water flooding, one of the instances the team had to deal with was the increase in the number of extreme weather events which saw a lot of rainfall on already saturated land which created service flow. This meant that focus

was on keeping the drainage infrastructure in as good a condition as possible with the funding that was available.

- An additional resource had been introduced in the last six months to lead local flood team to deal with oversight of business cases and funding applications. This had resulted in an additional £20k of funding.

RESOLVED:

The Highways and Transport Committee

1. Note the update on activity in relation to the Council's role as Lead Local Flood Authority undertaken in Quarter 1 and 2 (mid-year) 2022/23.

26 THIRD FINANCIAL REVIEW 2023/24

The Committee received the report which provided the third review of the Cheshire East Council forecast outturn for the financial year 2023/24. Committee Members were asked to consider the serious financial challenges being experienced and recognise the important activities being undertaken to minimise the impact on services.

Members noted the difficult financial pressures facing the Council and that the Highways and Infrastructure Service had a gross pressure of £2.2m.

In response to questions raised in relation to the Lane Rental Scheme, it was noted that the Council had been initiating benchmarking with other relevant authorities that had put together proposals and delivered upon such schemes. This was to be able to understand the extent of the work, any constraints and whatever information necessary to put forward a positive case. The Council would have to develop a package on which they wished to consult, prior to the scheme and demonstrate that Cheshire East could manage such a scheme. The Council would then seek approval of the proposals. The purpose of the lane rental scheme was to encourage statutory undertakers to take on their duties on the roads when there was less traffic - and charge those who wished to carry out their work at peak times, so it would be important to be cautious on income potential.

A detailed report would be submitted to the Highways and Transport Committee in April 2024 which would provide further details on the process and timescales.

RESOLVED:

The Highways and Transport Committee:

1. Notes the report of the Finance Sub Committee: Finance Sub Committee, 11th January, 2024.

2. Notes the factors leading to a forecast Net Revenue financial underspend of £0.2m against a revised budget of £11.2m (1.8%), for Highways and Transport Committee services.
3. Notes the forecast and the need for further mitigations to be identified.
4. Notes the in-year forecast Capital Spending of £68.1m against an approved MTFs budget of £63.9m, in respect of Highways and Transport Committee projects.
5. Notes the contents of Annex 1 and Appendix 6 and note that any financial mitigation decisions requiring approval will be made in line with relevant delegations.

27 PROW: GRAVEYARD LANE, MOBBERLEY DEFINITIVE MAP MODIFICATION ORDER APPLICATION

RESOLVED:

That this report be deferred to a future meeting of the Highways and Transport Committee.

28 PROW: TOFT DEFINITIVE MAP MODIFICATION ORDER APPLICATION

RESOLVED:

That this report be deferred to a future meeting of the Highways and Transport Committee.

29 APPOINTMENTS TO THE PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY CONSULTATIVE GROUP

RESOLVED: (By Majority)

That the Highways and Transport Committee

1. Retain the current Membership of Councillors L Crane and H Faddes of the Highways and Transport Committee to the Public Rights of Way Consultative Group.
2. Agree the Terms of Reference for the Public Rights of Way Consultative Group attached as appendix 1 to the report.

Councillor Arthur Moran wished it to be recorded that he abstained from the vote.

30 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the Work Programme. It was noted that the two Public Rights of Way reports which had been deferred would be added to the Work Programme for 4 April 2024.

The following items would also be added:

- In relation to minute 22, a report on pre-paid tickets being usable on all Cheshire East car parks be added to the work programme for 4 April 2024
- A report on a review of Member Budgets at a date to be agreed.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme, with the amendments highlighted above be noted.

31 HIGHWAYS SERVICE CONTRACT PEER REVIEW

The Committee considered a report which proposed a process and timetable to conduct an objective review and inform the Council's decision in respect of the break clause in relation to the 15-year contract (the "Highway Service Contract" or "HSC") that the Council entered into with Ringway-Jacobs Limited to deliver highway services. The Committee were also asked to consider the legal and financial implications of assessing the performance of the HSC.

An amendment was proposed and seconded in respect of recommendation 1c which be amended to read "Leader of the CEC Conservative Group or nominated person". This was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That the Highways and Transport Committee

1. Agree that a review of the Highways Service Contract (HSC) is undertaken and:

- a) Commence a peer review through which the Contract is assessed to inform future decisions regarding the HSC.
- b) Delegate authority to the Director of Highways and Infrastructure to finalise the scope of the HSC Peer Review.
- c) Approve that a Member Advisory Panel is established with the proposed membership as set out below and the Terms of Reference as set out in Appendix A.

The Chair of the Highways and Transport Committee

The Vice Chair of the Highways and Transport Committee

The Chair of the Finance Sub-Committee

Leader of the CEC Conservative Group or nominated person.

2. Note that a further report with a recommendation will be brought to the Highways and Transport Committee regarding the HSC in summer 2024 following the completion of the review.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 3.00 pm

Councillor C Browne (Chair)