

Review of Towns and Villages within Cheshire East Report of the Task and Finish Group

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Task and Finish Group Membership

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Introduction

At the request of the Cabinet Member for Environment, at its meeting held on 8 June 2010, the Environment and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee agreed to set up a Task and Finish Group to rank the towns and villages within Cheshire East, by criteria suggested by the Portfolio Holder and report back by October 2010.

The Task and Finish Group considered socio economic factors and other factors such as facilities, retail, hospitality, business and travel for each of the towns and villages through a series of site visits, marked these out of 10 against a set criteria (Appendix A) and then formulated this information into a table.

When ranking the towns and villages, Members took into account issues such as weather conditions and school holidays when carrying out the visits.

Agreed Terms of Reference

To rank towns and villages by criteria, to ensure that, if parking charges are reviewed sometime in the future, comparable towns and villages are treated equally and a reasonable tariff is created. It was agreed that Members would not be making recommendations to the Portfolio Holder on parking charges.

Methodology

24 June 2010	Members met to agree the questionnaires to be completed by them when visiting towns and villages and then went onto visit Congleton, Alsager and Nantwich. Councillor Thwaite attended the visit to Congleton.
7 July 2010	Members visited Audlem
12 July 2010	Members visited Handforth, Wilmslow, Alderley Edge, Knutsford and Holmes Chapel.
28 July 2010	Members visited Sandbach, Crewe and Middlewich
6 August 2010	Members visited Macclesfield, Tytherington and Prestbury
12 August 2010	Members visited Disley, Poynton and Bollington. Councillor Davenport attended the visit to Disley and Councillor West attended the visit to Poynton.
24 August 2010	Members met to discuss their findings from the visits and produced a table of rankings.
6 September 2010	Members met to agree the rankings and discuss the final report.
21 September 2010	Members met to approve the draft final report for submission to the Environment and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee.
26 October 2010	Draft final report submitted to the Environment and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee for comment/approval
	Draft report submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment

Evidence and Findings

Members visited each of the towns and villages in Cheshire East, which had Council owned car parks, to gain an understanding of the population, facilities, railway provisions, CCTV provisions, retail, food and drink provision, evening economy, ease of access to the centre, public transport provisions and parking availability and usage.

Each of the issues highlighted above were marked out of 10 and added together giving a possible total of 100. The Group then agreed the following formula to rank the towns and villages from A to E and incorporated this information into a table attached at Appendix B.

Score	Rank
81 - 100	A
71 - 80	B
51 - 70	C
41 - 50	D
0 - 40	E

Alderley Edge

The population of Alderley Edge is 4710. There are adequate facilities for the size of the village with a central railway station and a frequent bus service. There is currently a by-pass under construction which is expected to reduce traffic considerably. It is hoped that this will improve access to the centre.

The Group felt there was a good retail mix with plenty of food and drink provision and a good evening economy due to the number of bars and restaurants. There are 3 CCTV cameras to cover the village.

There are 5 Borough Council run car parks offering a total of 181 spaces. The group visited Alderley Edge and found the long stay car parks to be around 25% full. However, these were not in the centre of the village. There is a central short stay car park which was very well used and appeared to work well. There is also a free car park which was around 25% full; this car park is in poor condition and was not clearly sign posted.

Alsager

Alsager is a small town in the south east of the Borough with a population of 12440. There are reasonable facilities for the size of the town and whilst there is a railway station, it is neither on a main line nor close to the town centre. There is however, a frequent bus service and the town is easy to access.

The Group felt that there is a reasonable retail mix with good food and drink provisions and a limited evening economy. There are 6 CCTV cameras to cover the town.

There are 4 Borough Council run car parks offering 403 spaces, which are currently free to use, one of which is too far out of the town to be used by shoppers (Fannys Croft). Fairview car park was around 60% full, however this increased during school opening and closing times.

It was noted that there was a car park close to the Council's depot which required further investigation as to who owned it. This car park is in poor condition and has poor access.

Audlem

Audlem is a small village with a population of 1940. There are limited facilities for the village as it does not have a railway station and the bus service is limited. It is not easy to access.

The Group felt that there were limited retail facilities but the food and drink provisions were good for the size of the village. There are no CCTV cameras.

There is 1 Borough Council run car park offering 59 spaces, which is free to use and in good condition and central to the village. Members agreed that due

to size of the village and car park, it would not be viable to charge for car parking in the foreseeable future.

Bollington

The population of Bollington is 7400. There are average facilities in the town and it is easy to access. Bollington does not have a railway station although the bus service is frequent.

The Group felt that that Bollington has below average retail facilities for its size, however it is close to the facilities in Macclesfield. There are good food and drink provisions and a good evening economy. There are no CCTV cameras.

There is 1 main Borough Council run car park in Bollington offering 71 free spaces which is well used. There is also a civic centre car park and several car parks catering for the open space facilities such as the Middlewood Way and Adlington Road Recreation Ground. All the car parks were in good condition.

Congleton

To assist Members in their deliberations Councillor A Thwaite attended the tour of Congleton.

Congleton is a large market town with a population of 26530. Whilst it has good facilities, the railway is out of town with an irregular service, despite it being on a main line. Having said this, there is a good bus service and on the whole, the town is easy to access.

The Group felt that Congleton has a good retail mix with good food and drink provisions and an average evening economy. Planning permission has recently been approved for the redevelopment of the Bridestone area which will increase the town's attractiveness. There are currently 8 CCTV cameras to cover the town.

There are 14 Borough Council run car parks in Congleton providing a total of 799 spaces. The charging system in the car parks appeared to be working well and the car parks were in good condition.

Crewe

With a population of 50600, Crewe is the largest town in Cheshire East. Crewe is the primary shopping centre in the south of the Borough and there are excellent facilities, including a well positioned railway which allows access to the West Coast main line. Additionally, there is a good bus service but this could be improved to make access to the town centre easier.

The group felt that Crewe had excellent retail facilities and good food and drink provision. Having said this, there was feeling that the evening economy could be improved. There are 48 CCTV cameras to cover the town.

There are 32 Borough Council run car parks in Crewe offering 2643 spaces. It was noted that some of those car parks were currently free to use and that due to the size of them it would not be feasible to charge for them in the future. Members also agreed that a maximum stay of 20 minutes was not long enough and the possibility of increasing this should be investigated.

With regard to Thomas Street car park, Members noted that the car park was virtually empty. It was highlighted to the group that parking charges had recently been introduced and that this had caused displacement. Members agreed that the charging policy for this car park should be reviewed.

Disley

To assist Members in their deliberations, Councillor H Davenport attended the tour of Disley.

The population of Disley is 4210 and whilst there are limited facilities, the railway station is well positioned. There is a good bus service and the centre of Disley is reasonably easy to access.

The Group felt that there were limited retail facilities with good food and drink provisions and a limited evening economy. There are 3 CCTV cameras and Members agreed that additional CCTV cameras were required around the railway station to encourage more people to use the car park and facilities.

There are 2 Borough run car parks offering 60 free spaces. It was noted that the parking restrictions are not being enforced by the Borough Council and therefore people are parking beyond the maximum waiting time.

With regard to the conveniently located Community Centre car park, Members agreed that this needed remarking. Indeed, Councillor H Davenport suggested that the possibility of introducing parking charges should be investigated.

There is also a car park privately owned by the Rams Head Public House, which members of the public are currently permitted to use, however, this on occasions, was causing problems for the proprietor. Members agreed that a number of options should be investigated including the possibility of the Borough Council purchasing part of the car park, the proprietor introducing parking charges or the Borough Council managing the car park on behalf of the proprietor.

Haslington

The population of Haslington is 6670; there are limited facilities and although it does not have a railway station and there is a good bus service which makes it reasonably easy to access. There are no CCTV cameras.

The retail facilities in Haslington are limited along with food and drink provisions and the evening economy.

There is 1 free Borough Council run car park offering 15 spaces, which is in good condition. Due to the size of the village and car park, Members agreed that it would not be viable to introduce parking charges in the future.

Handforth

Handforth is a suburban area on the northern edge of Cheshire East with a population of 8014. There are average facilities, a well positioned railway station and a good bus service. It is easy to access.

There are adequate retail and food and drink provisions and a limited evening economy. There are 3 CCTV cameras to cover the area.

There are 2 Borough Council run car parks offering 102 spaces. There are also two privately owned car parks which require marking if they are to be used by the public. Members agreed that, if required, the possibility of them being managed by the Borough Council should be investigated. It was also agreed that the car park at the Paddock required managing and one of the car parks required maintenance work.

Holmes Chapel

Holmes Chapel has a population of 5780; there is an average provision of facilities; a good railway station/service and is easy to access.

There are adequate retail and food and drink provisions and a limited evening economy. There are 3 CCTV cameras.

There are 2 Borough run car parks offering 47 free car parking spaces, which are well marked and appear to work well. Due to the size of the car parks, Members agreed that it would not be viable to introduce parking charges in the foreseeable future. However the car parks did require managing.

Knutsford

Lying in the north east of the Borough some 19km to the south west of Manchester and 18km north west of Macclesfield, Knutsford has a population of 12650. It is easy to access with excellent facilities. There is a good railway station/service and a good bus service.

There are excellent retail facilities, food and drink provisions and evening economy. There are 14 CCTV cameras to cover the town.

There are 6 Borough Council run car parks, which are all well marked and work well. Members agreed that Booths car park, which is owned by the supermarket and managed by the Borough Council, is an excellent example of joint working.

Macclesfield

With a population of 50470, Macclesfield is the second largest town in Cheshire East. Easy to access, it has good facilities, an excellent railway station/service and an excellent bus service.

There are good retail facilities, excellent food and drink provisions and evening economy. There are 78 CCTV cameras.

There are 19 Borough Council run car parks, which are well maintained and work well. There are proposals for the redevelopment of the town centre for some time in the future.

Middlewich

A market town with a population of 13450, Middlewich, whilst being easy to access has a limited provision of facilities. For instance, although there is no railway station, there is a bus service. There are 5 CCTV cameras.

The Group felt that there were adequate retail and food and drink provision with a limited evening economy. There are 5 CCTV cameras.

There are 3 car parks in Middlewich offering 133 free car parking spaces. Members noted that one of the car parks was not well used and agreed that if parking charges were to be introduced. Tesco car park would also need to be taken into consideration albeit there is an approved scheme to increase the size of the Tesco store which may have an effect on the parking availability. However the Group felt that it would not be viable to charge for parking in the foreseeable future.

Nantwich

The population of Nantwich is 14100. A thriving service centre, Nantwich has an excellent provision of facilities; with a good railway station/service and bus service. The town centre is easy to access.

The group felt that there is excellent retail, food and drink provision and evening economy. There are 15 CCTV cameras

There are 10 car parks in Nantwich offering 750 spaces, the car parks were well used and well maintained.

Poynton

To assist Members in their deliberation Councillor R West attended the tour of Poynton.

Poynton, with a population of 14360, is in the north eastern corner of the Borough. There are above average facilities with a good railway station/service and a good bus service. The centre is easy to access.

The group felt that there are adequate retail, food and drink provisions and evening economy. There are 6 CCTV cameras.

There is one Borough Council run car park in Poynton currently offering 204 free short stay spaces. This car park is slightly unusual in that it is also shared between a doctors, Waitrose supermarket, Church and residential home. The car park is in good condition and is well used. Members agreed that if parking charges were to be considered the legal rights of the above agencies would need to be investigated and addressed.

Prestbury

Prestbury has a population of 3290 and has a limited provision of facilities; it has a well positioned railway station and a bus service. Prestbury is reasonably easy to access.

The group felt that there is limited retail provision with good food and drink provisions and evening economy. There are no CCTV cameras.

There are two car parks in Prestbury offering 122 free parking spaces; the car parks were well maintained, reasonably well used and in convenient locations.

Sandbach

Sandbach is a market town with a population of 17840. It has a limited provision of facilities, a railway station which is out of the town centre and a good bus service. The town is easy to access. There are 5 CCTV cameras.

There is an average provision of retail facilities, good food and drink provisions and a good evening economy.

There are 8 car parks offering 487 free parking spaces. Members agreed that while there were generally ample parking spaces there were problems on market day due to the market being held on the Scotch Common car park. It was also agreed that Scotch Common required a maximum waiting time of 2 hours.

Tytherington

The Group agreed that as Tytherington was not a town or village and it did not have a Council owned car park, it should not be included within this review.

Wilmslow

Easy to access, Wilmslow has a population of 30020. It has a good provision of facilities, an excellent railway station/line and good bus service. There are 62 CCTV cameras.

The Group felt that it has excellent retail facilities; food and drink provisions and evening economy.

There are 8 Borough run car parks offering 1239 spaces. The Group visited Wilmslow on a wet day and found most of the car parks to be well used. However the car park on Spring Street was virtually empty apart from the sections managed by Emersons which were in a disgusting state and Members agreed that action should be taken to address this issue.

Recommendations

1. That the rankings of towns and villages identified at Appendix B be approved.
2. That any future decisions made by the Portfolio Holder should be in line with the Cheshire East Council Parking Strategy.
3. That when car parking is reviewed in the future, consideration be given to the following observations:
 - That the parking charges on Thomas Street car park in Crewe be reviewed.
 - That the parking restrictions in Disley be enforced on a regular basis.
 - That the possibility of charging for parking in Disley be investigated.
 - That a solution to the parking problems on the Rams Head public house car park be sought.
 - That the possibility of the Borough Council managing the privately owned car parks in Handforth be investigated.
 - That the car park at the Paddock in Handforth have a maximum waiting time, which must be enforced.
 - That due to the size of the car parks Audlem, Haslington, Holmes Chapel and Middlewich, parking charges should not be implemented.
 - That the working arrangements for the Booths supermarket car park in Knutsford be used as an example of good practice.
 - That the legal issues regarding the car park in Poynton be investigated.
 - That action be taken to increase the usage and cleanliness of Spring Street car park in Wilmslow.

Evidence Received/Background Information

- Information on the Borough owned car parks including number of spaces and current tariffs
- Information on the number and location of CCTV within the Borough
- Information on the current employment levels
- Information on the population of towns and villages within the Borough
- Economic information for the towns and villages.