

Bollington Town Council's Response to the Cheshire East Parking Strategy Review

Aims and objectives of Cheshire East of its car parking strategy:

Cheshire East Council describes itself as being Open Fair and Green. These characteristics underpin the statements that Cheshire East has the **Strategic Priorities**. The Council is:

- An open and enabling organisation.
- A council which empowers and cares about people; and
- A thriving and sustainable place

The description of the purposes of Car Parking policy CEC states:

the **Local Transport Plan** sets out how parking measures **should be considered**.

1. as part of an integrated transport solution.
2. It establishes how parking provision supports **accessibility** for residents, businesses, shoppers, workers, and commuters.
3. The Plan recognises that parking provision has the potential to impact on surrounding areas both negatively and positively.
4. When parking is well managed it can support thriving businesses, access to services and active social lives.
5. but when not well managed, parking can encourage car travel to areas which suffer unduly from congestion as well as causing other environmental, health and social issues.

The Cheshire East Report on Pool Bank Car Park Bollington deals with none of the issues set out above except describing how charging will be likely **to negatively** impact of the surrounding narrow and crowded streets by displacing cars from the 77 free spaces currently available. Being free of charge encourages maximum use of the car park at all times.

A) The advantage of a free car park at Pool Bank:

Residents -

A free car park supports accessibility for residents, has a very positive role in maximising access to local on street parking, which is very limited, and therefore impacts very positively on the surrounding environment and shows good management in that no charging allows maximum use in a very congested area.

1. Bollington is a former industrial town. The part of Bollington served by Pool Bank Car Park has a concentration of terraced house built on to narrow roads. There are no opportunities for residents to arrange for off street parking. A free car park ensures that 77 cars can be removed from the street at all times.

2. This sensible policy allows maximum safe car parking and matches the overriding need of the area for car management.
3. This has been successfully in place since the Car Park was introduced by Bollington Urban District Council in the 1950's and has not been challenged as inappropriate by any public body since.
4. The free car park increases the ease of traffic flow in the most concentrated urban area of the Town
5. The availability of the free car park has become even more important to traffic movement recently with the increase in home-based working.
6. Further, displacing the great variety of drivers who use Pool Bank Car Park to dangerous roadside parking will discourage local cyclists from using the roads and make walking and using public transport less attractive. It will increase the perception of danger on the roads and in the town for all and particularly for families. This cannot be in line with Cheshire East's climate objectives.
7. Pool Bank car park is a through-way for residents who live in Queen St and other roads on the far side of it to reach their houses from Palmerston St. In a chargeable car park, it is likely that residents who are merely trying to reach their homes by car through Bollington's narrow and crowded road system will be noted on the automatic charging system and charged although they have not stopped or parked in the car park. There do not appear to be any mechanisms suggested in the consultation to recognise that in a town of Bollington's density and historic road system such routes are essential and local residents must be able to access their homes in their cars without having to pay to do so.
8. Bollington has a significantly reduced level of public transport, which makes the need for car use and car parking greater. Unlike other local centres, for instance Poynton and Prestbury there is no rail service. Further, over time the no 10 bus to and from Macclesfield has had its service reduced so that there is now no evening service at all and no service on Sundays. It is expected that the service from Bollington to Stockport which includes Stepping Hill Hospital will be further reduced or completely cut in the future. The reduction of public transport has significantly contributed to the need for residents to rely on their own transport and to the increase in car parking needs for residents.

Local Businesses -

High Street, the junction with Palmerston Street and Palmerston Street are one centre of Bollington retail business activity. There are a mixture of businesses including restaurants, cafes, delicatessen, a bakery, a fish and chip shop, butchers with fresh vegetables, newspapers and general store, modest grocers, funeral director, print shop for personal and local business needs.

The **Bollington Neighbourhood Plan**, fully supported and ratified by Cheshire East in 2018 confirms its commitment to do the following:

R.01 'To provide a better, more attractive and diverse retail offering, which supports the needs of the community' and:

R.P1 'Retain and develop retail offerings.

1. These shops are vital to the sustainability of residents in our small town. Their existence reduces car usage overall.
2. A free car park is a vital incentive for people to stop and shop. Any blockage to customer flow into those modest retail outlets could tip the balance into their disappearance with the consequent reduction in the sustainability of our community. **None of these retail outlets or restaurants and cafes have any significant off-street parking.** They rely totally on Pool Bank Car Park for off street parking. It is a vital adjunct to their sustainability.
3. The free car park encourages the view of accessibility to local shops by residents and in practice offers that accessibility.
4. Charging for the car park would impact negatively on customer flow, increase the time for customers having to find on street parking nearby in what already might be crowded with residents parking and increase traffic movement in a confined urban area thus increasing air pollution.
5. Charging for the car park would therefore impact negatively on our small business retail outlets, all of which have worked hard to return to pre-pandemic levels of footfall and which have managed, with considerable hard work, to weather the last year's increases in costs, particularly in energy prices and materials.
6. Over time the introduction of charging could reduce the businesses operating to meet basic needs in the area and as businesses leave footfall declines and the area would cease to exist as a retail centre.
7. **There is already much competition:** free car parking within 5 minutes of Bollington when you are in a car. A huge food hall at Barracks Mill including M&S: free car parking. A huge general store at Tesco, with a petrol station: free car parking. Why go to your local store when you have to pay a fee or spend 10 minutes finding off street parking with manoeuvring your car very carefully to avoid dents and scratches?

Visitors -

Bollington is regarded as an attractive town and over the years efforts both Council and Community have been made to attract visitors to our Town through annual events like the Bikefest, Hill runs, the Walking Festival and every so often the larger scale Bollington Festival. At all times of the year cyclists are to be seen throughout the town in large groups.

But Bollington is also a regular centre for local residents walking given it is central to the Peak Fringe next to the famous Peak National Park and has access to a myriad of walks into the hills, yet friendly pubs and good quality restaurants to welcome walkers when they return.

Easy and free car parking is an essential element in attracting walkers and walkers need refreshment.

The **Neighbourhood Plan's** commitment at MA.01 is: 'to support the safety and efficiency of moving around the Town for pedestrians, motorists and cyclists while actively promoting walking and cycling'.

Charging for Pool Bank will discourage walkers from using the car park and they will congregate elsewhere where there is a slightly wider road on the outskirts of the Town. When they return to their cars, they will be too far away to be attracted to use the Town resources of pubs, restaurants and cafes so again charging has a negative impact on accessibility and business turnover in Bollington. At a time when hospitality across the country faces many challenges, Bollington depends on its tourists and visitors to sustain its healthy local economy and ensure that local jobs and amenities are retained.

B) Analysis of the Bollington Parking Strategy Report

The Cheshire East chart shows that at 8am an average of 50 places are occupied and at 6pm an average of 30 places are occupied, during the data collection period. This is clear evidence that a very substantial proportion of spaces are taken up with residential parking and as stated above there are no alternatives for Bollington's residents.

Page 10: The duration of stay data takes no account of parking between 6pm and 8am, so the data is not representative of actual use.

Page 14: The assessment is that the elasticity band is low, thereby assuming that there will only be a 10% reduction in usage following introduction of charging. This is difficult to understand given the references in the 'Elasticity Framework Technical Note' and the fact that as stated in the Technical Note there is no vacancy rate or footfall data for Bollington, which are normally used to assess the elasticity band. A more realistic assessment, for where charging is introduced for a car park which was previously free, would be high elasticity and a 30% reduction in use following introduction of charging.

A 30% reduction in usage would reduce the total income to approximately £49K and Net Annual Revenue to £41K. It is unclear whether you have factored in other operating costs (machine installation and maintenance, civil enforcement officer time etc) which would likely reduce this income further.

Page 19/20: The report assesses the likelihood of mitigation measures being necessary as Amber, based on a low elasticity band. A high elasticity band would suggest that the likelihood may well be Red.

The proposed mitigations are a combination of double yellow lines and residential parking bays at a cost of between £50K to £85K. All of this is clearly vital data in assessing whether the introduction of charging is likely to raise income as stated.

The cheapest way for a resident to continue to use Pool Bank car park if they wish to park there on a daily basis is the annual charge option of £490. There appears to be no proposals for permits to residents at reduced cost.

Roadside parking/Signage

Changing from no return within 45 minutes to no return within 2 hours will have little actual impact and result in unnecessary costs of signage change.

Changing parking control times from 9am to 5pm to 8am to 6pm on roadsides and in car parks substantially reduces the convenience for those who park overnight and leave after 8am but before 9am and return after 5pm but before 6pm. Again, the cost of signage change for this will be substantial.

There are clearly significant omissions and flaws in the data provided. It does not accurately represent the parking landscape in Bollington and does not adequately consider the costs of mitigation or the considerable costs to the residents of Bollington of such a change which would have a deeply detrimental impact on their lives and on all other aspects of the working of the town.

C) Conclusion

The free car park at Pool Bank, first recognised as a key supporting element to the sustainability of Bollington business in particular and therefore the sustainability of the Town as a whole, by Bollington Urban district Council nearly 70 years ago still serves that purpose in the much more fiercely competitive retail atmosphere of the first quarter of the 21st. Century.

Bollington's Neighbourhood Plan states its commitment to the parking needs of its residents and visitor at MA.0: 'To progress standard residential and public parking provision within Bollington.'

If Cheshire East genuinely wants to fulfil its aims of using its car parks to sustain communities and maintain accessibility for residents' businesses and visitors, it will sustain the free car park in the centre of Bollington Old Town.

If Cheshire East Council decides that it needs to remove £60K per year from our community and block access to small businesses as well as impose significant charges upon residents then it will introduce charges despite the very clear and well-articulated opposition from the residents, businesses and local visitors' groups, which will be reflected in the many responses to the consultation and to a local petition, which has so far been signed by 1500 people.

This will, however, be a severe and long-term detriment to our community and to our residents' lives across the town. Cheshire East will be seen to have broken its stated priorities and will not be seen to be supporting a local community in:

- Protecting and **enhancing public realm** and heritage
- **Improving connections for local people** to safeguard businesses, economy, and local wellbeing
- **Encouraging walking and cycling** to move towards a more sustainable Cheshire East and our climate targets

The above are the stated priorities of Cheshire East, which also states that these priorities will be 'central when considering future parking strategies.

In the proposals for Bollington, Cheshire East has failed to fulfil these priorities. It has also failed to uphold the Strategic Priorities quoted at the start of this response.

Cheshire East must think again and withdraw these flawed and detrimental proposals for Bollington.