

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leader and Cabinet
AUTHOR/S: Executive Director / Lands Officer

12 April 2007

PUBLIC CAR PARK OFF HIGH STREET, HISTON

Purpose

1. To seek the decision of Cabinet on the future of the public car park off High Street, Histon (as shown on **attached plan**), following the decision of the Housing Portfolio Holder on 3 April 2007.

Executive Summary

2. The Council has agreed to the disposal of its four public car parks and the Histon site remains the only one where a sale or lease is not imminent. Histon Parish Council declined an offer of a lease of the site at nominal rent as they were unable to make such a commitment but agreed to discuss options with the Council. Their report on the results of their subsequent survey of parking use indicates that charging for parking is unfeasible. Interest to purchase or lease the site has been sought from a major retail outlet in the village centre but declined.

Background

3. The disposal of all the Council's public car parks was agreed by Cabinet and ratified by Full Council as part of the budget savings exercise following council tax capping.
4. The public car park sites at Linton and Sawston are to be leased by the respective Parish Councils at nominal rent, subject to the sites offering free parking. The freehold interest of the site in Melbourn is being transferred to Melbourn Parish Council for use as offices, community facilities and free public parking.
5. Background information regarding disposal of the site in Histon is as follows:
 - a) Based on a sale subject to a covenant restricting its future use to car parking only but not precluding the purchaser from charging for car parking use, the market value of the freehold interest of the Histon site with vacant possession has been assessed by the District Valuer at £95,000.
 - b) Maintenance costs of the car park over the last 10 years and current National Non-Domestic Rates are shown in **Background Paper 1**.
 - c) Planning have confirmed that they would strongly oppose any change of use of this car park.
 - d) Telereal (BT property who own the access road) confirm that the car park site was conveyed to the Council and the Council's successors in Title, with the inclusion of a right of way over the access road. The same right would therefore be conveyed to any new owner.
6. The following decision was made by the Housing Portfolio Holder on 8 March 2006:

To seek interest from Histon Parish Council in a long-term lease of the car park site off High Street, Histon at nominal rent, subject to the leaseholder being responsible for ongoing maintenance and payment of NNDR (rates). This offer was subject to the site remaining a free public car park.

7. Histon Parish Council's response to this proposal was that they could not commit to an undertaking to lease the car park at this time but that they wished to discuss and review the options for the site with SCDC.
8. A meeting was held with the Parish Chairman and Councillor Mason on 22 May 2006 to discuss options and it was agreed that the Parish Council would carry out a survey of car park use and consider whether it would be feasible to charge local businesses for parking use. The results of their survey are shown in **Background Paper 2**.
9. In October 2006 interest was sought from Tesco who own the main retail outlet in Histon centre, to purchase or lease the site subject to it remaining a free public car park.
10. No written response has been received from Tesco despite requests/reminders from the Lands Officer but it has now been verbally indicated by the Store Manager that the company is unlikely to be interested in the site as it is not immediately adjacent the store.

Considerations

11. The car park is well used by local shoppers and business people and is a valuable asset to the village centre.
12. The Parish Council's report indicates that it would not be feasible to charge local businesses for parking use. There may also be considerable opposition from local residents if charges were introduced and traffic congestion and street parking would increase in the centre.
13. An open market sale of the site would not preclude a purchaser from introducing parking charges.
14. Various options aimed at relieving the Council of the costs of car park maintenance and payment of rates, including disposal of the site with use being retained as a free public car park, have been explored but appear to be unfeasible at the present time.

Options

15. Retain the site off High Street, Histon in Council ownership until an opportunity arises for its disposal or lease as a free public car park.
16. Place the site for sale on the open market, for car parking use only.

Implications

Financial	By disposing of this site on the open market, a capital receipt could accrue to the Council. Ongoing maintenance costs and rates to be borne by the Council if the site is retained.
Legal	The sale of this site is not subject to the Right to Buy legislation.
Staffing	None

Risk Management	None
Equal Opportunities	None

Consultations

17. Histon Parish Council's views regarding the site are expressed in their report (Background Paper 2).
18. Councillors Mason, Chatfield and Davies have been consulted since the verbal response was received from Tesco and they all agree that the site should be retained by the Council until an opportunity arises for its disposal or lease as a free public car park.

Effect on Annual Priorities and Corporate Objectives

Affordable Homes	None
Customer Service	None
Northstowe and other growth areas	None
Quality, Accessible Services	None
Village Life	The car park is a valuable asset to the village centre
Sustainability	Provision of a free public parking area in Histon centre helps to relieve traffic congestion and prevent street parking
Partnership	None

Recommendations

19. Retain the site off High Street, Histon in Council ownership until an opportunity arises for its disposal or lease as a free public car park.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

1. Maintenance costs and National Non-domestic Rates
2. Results of survey and report of Histon Parish Council, September 2006

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